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DIME NOVELS



JOB DEAN, THE TRAPPER.

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JOB DEAN,

THE TRAPPER.

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JOB DEAN, THE TRAPPER.

CHAPTER I.

THE FRONTIER FORT.

"WELL, captain, I don't know how you feel, but to me this kind of life is about enough to rust the soul of a man out of him."

"That's so; and all these months with never a red-skin in sight! A smart brush with the rascals would be quite a diversion, but there don't seem much chance of it. However, the relief can not be many weeks distant, and then, hurrah for a change of some sort!"

This brief conversation took place within a United States fort situated upon the Kansas-Nebraska border, at its western extremity, and near the Kansas river. The speakers were Captain Kessler and his friend, Harmer Dorlon. No person could mistake their characters—one a soldier by profession and choice, looked as if nature had endowed him with many qualifications for his business. Tall, active, well-formed, with an open, manly face, clear, calm eyes, a resolute mouth, closely-curling chestnut hair, and an expression at once of gravity and good-nature, he was a man for other men to respect and confide in, and for women to love. The other had but lately ended his student life. Wonderfully-keen glances shot from his deep-set eyes. His face was pale but not effeminate; his frame light and slender, but not without a careless strength, which told of college triumphs, not only at the desk but in manly exercises. The two were fast friends, and had been so for many years; and when the soldier had been at the post for some time, Darlon, thinking that a little life at the West would be no bad experience, joined him.

The fort, though but an earthwork inclosure, was well built and strengthened with logs, and contained within itself ample space for a company of Uncle Sam's dragoons with

their officers. The rudely-constructed huts which formed the quarters of men and horses, were tolerably convenient also, and not without a certain attempt even at elegance. The fort was situated upon a plain which stretched south and east for some miles, while to the west the ground was more rolling, and rose considerably at no great distance.

The time was evening, and the gray shadows already were rising in the east, while the setting sun shed a flood of glory all over the western sky:—a peaceful time, a time when the mind goes back to sunsets years ago, seen from well-loved, happy homes thousands of miles away. And yet, there are dull times enough in these lonely frontier military settlements. The routine of duty for those sixty men left much leisure. A rapid scout of a few miles varied the monotony now and then. The occasional arrival of an emigrant-train, bound further west, or of a lonely trapper with his pouch and rifle, sometimes broke in upon the dullness, and, at irregular intervals, some traders and agents with goods for the Indians, and their traffic and revelry changed the general stillness into noisy activity.

But, as the captain said, the life at the fort had for months been entirely without incident. There had been literally nothing to do. The hostile Sioux were believed to have approached in small parties, but had not showed themselves. An emigrant-train or two had called at the near-at-hand trading-post, but stayed only a little while, and the captain and his lieutenants and their visitor felt as dull as dull could be.

“And yet,” said the captain, “one comes to have a kind of settled feeling, and even to like this sort of quarters. The solitude of nature is not always loneliness. Looking now at yonder sunset, which is gilding—Hullo, what’s that?”

As he thus abruptly spoke he looked eagerly westward, and suddenly ordered a party to mount and follow him. Following his eager gaze, the bystanders discerned a human form rapidly descending the slope of a slight rising in the ground about half a mile distant, and as it came nearer, saw that it was a man, running at his utmost speed, though incumbered with a female, whose insensible form he bore in his arms. Quick as thought the party moved out and

galloped toward him. No sooner had they reached him than he fell heavily upon the ground and lay speechless and gasping. To catch up both and lay them across in front of a couple of the men was but the work of an instant, and almost before those who had remained in the fort could realize the incident, the whole party had returned.

"Something ugly about this," said the captain, hastily dismounting. "Lieutenant Roberts, get the men under arms, and look to the gates. Double the guards, too. I've seen this sort of thing once before, and it means mischief."

The whole interior of the fort at once became a scene of bustling activity, and in less time than it takes to tell, the command was ready for what might come.

The man who had thus suddenly appeared among them bore the marks of utter prostration and terror. He seemed about fifty years of age, and was of great apparent strength, though for the present he lay upon the ground quite powerless. The female who had been lifted from his arms was placed upon a bench, supported by the officers, who tried, by sprinkling water on her face, to arouse her from a kind of stupor that resembled death. All the while the man's eyes never left her, but gazed with such a mixture of love and horror that it was piteous to see.

She was young and pretty. Her form, although clad in the homely garments of humble life, was graceful and rounded. Not, evidently, more than eighteen years of age, the loveliness of matured womanhood was hers. But now, the roses on her cheeks had vanished, and she lay leaning upon the arm of the captain as if life would never return.

At length the man spoke, and cried for water. It was brought, and some brandy mixed with it.

"Are any more come in?" he asked, in a voice scarce above a whisper.

"No," said Harmer. "How many were there? and where?"

"Ten of us, besides the women. Oh God!" and then suddenly rising to his feet, he fairly shrieked, with agony:

"Ten of us, ten of us, besides the women. Four boys and two girls, and their mother. Oh, my poor wife, why did I ever want to go away from the old homestead! Gentlemen, they were my boys and my girls, and there was Jake

and Peter, and Peter's two boys, and Bill Heath—all gone, nobody left but us two," and the man flung himself upon the earth with a cry like that of a beast wounded in a mortal part.

"Calm yourself, my poor fellow," said Harmer. "Tell us more about it."

"More, more? What more to tell? Indians and blood! What more to tell? Like snakes they came on us—we hadn't time to fire a shot before their knives were at us. Only us two left, only us two!"

By this time the alarm had spread to the more domestic region of the fort, and Mrs. Heffernan, the portly wife of the corporal of that name, came running from her hut, if running be not too irreverent a phrase for describing her heavy quick-march.

"What's this now?" she exclaimed, with uplifted hand "Oh, glory! But what's the matter with that poor craychur there? Oh, darlin', let me take ye meself, for it's in a bad way ye are."

So saying, she gently lifted the girl in her arms, and bore her away as if she were a sleeping child.

"That's all right," said the captain, considerably relieved. "Now for our other friend," added he, turning to where the stricken man still lay prostrate. "Get up, friend, and pull yourself together a bit. That's well. Now take a little more of this. That's better. Now just tell us your story straight through, and as quickly as you can. We may have to put the finish to it ourselves, don't you see?"

"I'll try, sir. There was me and my wife and our two girls, and our four boys, and Jake and Pete and Pete's two sons, and Bill Heath. We was bound for Denver, sir. We was from Illinois. We had got hereabouts and lost our way, or else the man we hired to guide us lost it for us. Not two miles from here, aways yonder, we was camped in a grove, and the Injuns set on us sudden, and—oh great God! 'Twas all I could do. They was all down, and I snatched up Polly and run. They chased us till we got to the top of yon b'uff, and then stopped. We're all that's left."

"How many Indians were there?"

The man passed his hand across his head as if bewildered.

"I can't say rightly; 'twas a big crowd."

"A thousand?"

"May be, may be less. I don't know. I was like struck by lightnin'."

"Had they guns?"

"Yes, they *had*, but none on 'em were fired off, or else I was too scared to notice."

"Well, that's all at present. Here, orderly, let this man have somewhere to rest. The girl is safe, friend. Just you clear out for a bit, too."

The consultation which followed was brief, but to the purpose. The command numbered about fifty effective men. Of these, twenty were told off, while the rest were ordered to keep a bright look-out from the fort, a lieutenant being left with them. The captain and second lieutenant then rode out at the head of the party to reconnoiter. Two men with their Sharp's carbines unslung at about a couple of hundred yards' distance, led the advance, and all moved slowly and cautiously toward the bluff beyond which the recent tragedy had been enacted.

No enemy was in sight. One of the leading troopers dismounted when they reached the base of the hill, and, throwing himself upon the ground began to crawl up the face, while the rest watched him breathlessly. He had not to go a hundred yards before reaching the top, and then lifting his head he peered down over the plain beyond. Then he beckoned to his comrades, the whole of whom at once spurred rapidly up the ascent.

Still there was no enemy in sight. The plains beyond this point stretched for miles, only relieved by a few belts of timber, beyond which the waters of the Kansas river were visible, as they sparkled in the evening sun.

A single man was now left on the hill, and instructed to fire his piece if any hostile appearances presented themselves. Then, in the same order as before, but with every sword loosened in its sheath, and every trigger-guard with a finger upon it, the march was recommenced.

Still no enemy in sight. But, there was something else as bad. For in the second patch of live-oak and scrub, were the ghastly forms of murdered and mutilated human beings.

Stretched upon the ground which was soaked deep with their blood, hacked by knives, their heads bleeding where their scalps had been torn away, and in the distorted attitudes in which they died, were these poor creatures, so full of life but a short hour before, now a confused heap of gashed corpses. All had been killed; not one living remained! No Indian could be seen. The baggage of the party had been ransacked and all the arms carried off. The horses were turned loose and were quietly grazing around.

The soldiers gazed at this sorry sight with feelings too deep for utterance, and nothing but the rules of discipline kept them from starting in instant pursuit. But, besides the fact that the direction of the trail was so far undiscovered, there were other reasons for great caution. And then, there was a ghastly burial to be performed.

"We must get back to the fort," said the captain, "as quickly as possible, and make our arrangements there. If, as I suspect, there is a large body of the fiends not far off, we shall have a busy time. They would never have ventured so near without support. What say you, gentlemen?"

At this moment the sharp report of a carbine was heard from the sentinel upon the hill.

To remount and gallop toward him was the work of a few seconds, and soon the soldiers were asking questions as eagerly as he seemed anxious to answer.

"What did you see?"

"Away off to the north-west, sir, a sort of cloud of specks just showed on the horizon, and then went out of sight. See there, again!"

Sure enough; there were specks visible in the horizon. And as before only for an instant, nor did the soldiers see them again, although they gazed long and earnestly.

No more time was lost in returning to the fort. The evening shadows were growing and "there was work to be done," said the captain.

"What do you expect?" said Harmer, when, the burying completed, the force had once more come into quarters.

"A night attack, that's all."

"Perhaps to-night, captain; them fellers knows a thing or two, you bet," said a strange voice.

CHAPTER II.

JOB

A NEW actor had appeared upon the scene. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, of about thirty-five years of age, though exposure and exercise had so bronzed his skin that at a first glance it was difficult to guess how old he was. His dress consisted of the ordinary trapper's attire, a hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins all of deer-skin; at his back a small pack; a powder-horn and bullet-pouch and knife at his side, and a rifle in his hand. An honest, open-hearted face, too, with a pair of as laughing blue eyes as ever puzzled a maid.

"Why, Dean, when did you arrive?" said the captain, with much surprise.

"Half an hour ago."

"Where do you come from?"

"Not far from whar you've been to."

"Then you saw—"

"I see'd a good deal, captain." And with strong emotion the trapper turned aside and dashed from his eyes what no brave man is ever ashamed of. "Yes, I see'd most of it. I was laying close all the while. This was the way 'twas. I'd been out for six weeks across the border and had pretty bad luck. What with one thing and another there's not the game there used to be. And I thought I'd make for the fort just for a change, besides which my powder was pretty nigh run out. Well, I came along easy, and this morning got to the patch of timber where I see'd you awhile ago. Feeling just a bit tired I concluded to rest a spell before coming in, and was just a-going to fling myself on the ground when I heerd a sound I knowed well. It didn't take long before I was safe up in a scrub-oak and waiting to see what 'ud come next. Sure enough 'twas a lot of them dirty Sioux that came in just below where I was lying out of their sight. I reckoned they was after no good, for they was all dressed in their war-paint and looked like mischief. They didn't suspect me,

that was one comfort, and I'd roosted among the branches often enough not to be in a hurry or put myself out of the way. I'd lashed my rifle safe enough, and had a first rate place for a nap, and felt quite comfortable.

"The varmints stayed a matter of three hours, when I began to get a bit drowsy, and couldn't help dozing off to sleep every five minutes. I knew I couldn't fall, and presently I was fairly dreaming. Nice scrape, captain—fast asleep right over a set of devils that wouldn't give ye time to wink afore you was riddled with bullets. How long I slept I didn't know, but I waked up mighty sudden, for just filing into the grove was a lot of emigrants with their teams, but not an Indian in sight! It looked bad, and I was just going to sing out a warning, when, before I could count one, the red-skins was upon 'em, and, all but an old man and a girl who got away somehow, the whole party was down, dead or dying.

"Captain, I've seen sights on these here prairies that I don't want to see again; but, when I looked down upon them poor unfortunate creatures, with the blood streaming from them, and them imps of Satan dancing around 'em, an' waving their bleeding scalps, my heart turned sick, and I felt as if it couldn't all be real. It didn't take many minutes—'twas all over soon. Then came the plundering, and after that the murdering thieves were gone as quick as they had come.

"As soon as I thought all safe I came down and run, and got in here after you had left, and here I am."

"I wish you'd come straight on before," said the captain; "but there's no help for it now. How many Indians were there?"

"Nigh on two hundred, as near as I could tell, and there was more not far off."

"What do you think about it? They were on the war-path, you said?"

"They were. And if you don't hear of 'em round these diggin's pretty soon, I'm not Job Dean."

"I think so too. I only pray they *may* come!"

"There's one barrel'd like to talk to 'em, anyhow," said the trapper, patting his heavy rifle as he spoke.

By this time it was very nearly dark. Vigorous preparations for defense were made; the men were ordered to lie on

their arms; the sentries were doubled. To any one who could have witnessed the stern watchfulness of that little garrison there would have appeared little cause for alarm.

The night came on, and a heavy blackness settled upon every object. Not a single light was allowed in any part of the fort from which it could be seen outside.

Thus the silent hours crept on. Still, no signs of an attack. Eleven, twelve, one, and two o'clock nearly struck.

"There'll be no trouble to-night," said Captain Kessler to the trapper.

"The night ain't over yet," whispered the other.

"Besides, though we are all prepared, I should hardly think the savages would venture on the very night after the massacre. They must know that we should be unusually vigilant."

"There you wrong them artful brutes. They argue just this way: You don't expect 'em to be rash enough to be around here so soon; you calc'late on a muss before long, but not to-night. That's how they put it. Well, they'll do jist what they think you don't expect 'em to do, and that's—"

The sentence was unfinished. Suddenly a yell filled the air on every side of the fort, as if a thousand demons were all around it. Then the blaze of a rifle-volley rent the darkness, and a storm of bullets crashed against the heavy timbers of the fort or sunk with a roll of dull "thuds" into the thick earthworks. Then all was still for a moment, when the voice of Kessler rung out, sharp and clear:

"Aim low, boys, ready—"

And the answering volley of the garrison would have torn the earth up for a thousand yards had not the trapper suddenly clapped his hand upon the captain's mouth, and whispered earnestly:

"For God's sake, captain, hold on. Ef they draw your fire ye mayn't have time for a load, as sure as I'm a living sinner."

"I thank you, John," said the other. "You are right and I was wrong. I forgot all my experience in a moment, but it won't happen again."

Of course the whole garrison had sprung to their feet, and

the men were now lining the inner defenses of the fort. An outer and more extended line of works had been abandoned as preventing a sufficiently solid concentration of the men. The firing of the Indians had been beyond this outer defense.

Profound silence succeeded for nearly half an hour. It was surmised that the Indians had probably passed between the two lines, the distance between which was over two hundred yards. But there was no certainty.

With great caution the trapper very slowly raised his head to an embrasure and peeped through. He could see nothing, but he felt that there was a crowd of living creatures out in that darkness, and cautiously descending, bade the captain "look out for squalls."

Then, a second time, the infernal yelling of hundreds of throats pierced the ears of the soldiers, and before its reverberation had ceased, all four sides of the fort were attacked at once.

Instantly there was work enough and of the hottest, for, screeching and firing their rifles, the Indians were climbing the barricades like cats, and dropping in among the soldiers. But there were not many who succeeded so far; and the moon, at that instant breaking through the clouds, the soldiers shot or dashed out the brains of every one of those who passed the ramparts.

The light was a godsend to one side at least, for, after its beams poured down upon the scene, not an Indian dared show his head above the rampart, but kept close under it, working hard with hatchets to force their way through. At one point they partially succeeded, and made a fierce rush, actually for a moment creating some confusion, and fighting desperately within that side of the fort. But they were beaten back, leaving the ground strewn with corpses. Then the attack ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The brief moonlight also became overcast again, and all was as dark as before, and as still except for a few smothered groans.

Not many minutes passed, when the trapper, turning aside, whispered:

"Captain, where are ye?"

But there was no response, and he made no further inquiry

There was no more fighting that night. When the gray dawn began to streak the east, not an Indian was in sight save the few bodies stretched upon the ground within the fort.

But a new excitement began to thrill through the groups of soldiers who looked at each other.

Where was the captain?

No one had seen him since the *melée* following the entrance of a portion of the enemy. Intense excitement at once prevailed, for it became clear that *he* had been captured and carried off, though *how* was a mystery to all. Had a single outcry been heard from him, or had he been seen in conflict with any of the foe, his abduction would have been impossible; but there was no indication from which a conjecture could be formed.

Pursuit was necessary if his life were to be saved, but who were there to undertake it? The garrison was weaker by nine wounded men, among them Harmer Dorlon. A force must be left to protect the fort. Hence the number who could be spared to follow the Indians was small indeed.

Time, of course, was of the utmost consequence. The first-lieutenant, Roberts, proceeded at once to address the command, and to call for volunteers for a pursuit. Every man stepped forward.

"'Pears to me, leftenant," said the trapper, aside to the officer, "that you have only one plan that's of any use. You *can't* spare a big enough party for this work, and there's only one way to go about the job."

"And what is the plan, Dean?" We know you are the best to advise, so go about it."

"If the captain is to be rescued at all it must be by circum-ventin' them as has got him."

"But how, and who's to do it?"

"Well, I'm one of 'em, and I want half a score more, under my orders, too—the best men you've got."

"I shall go with you," said the lieutenant.

"You'll stop where y'are. Now, which of the boys is most posted on this here Indian business?"

The selection was soon made of ten of the most active and experienced of the troopers. By Dean's wish they divested

themselves of all accouterments that would, by jingling, announce their presence to an enemy. Each took a rifle, a brace of revolvers and a knife, besides a small quantity of provisions packed on their horses. Then, with the trapper on foot at their head, they started from the fort. There were signs enough of the route taken by the retreating Indians, which lay to the north-west. Following it, the little party were soon lost to sight

CHAPTER III.

THE RESPONSE.

HARMER DORLON having been wounded, had been made as comfortable as possible. A severe cut had laid his side open, and another gashed his left arm fearfully; but neither hurt was mortal if care were taken against fever and to prevent a further loss of blood. Lying upon a camp-bed in the captain's hut, he looked ghastly enough, however, and helpless as an infant. At his side was a surgeon, who had just finished attending to his wounds, and an old man who seemed bent with grief and anxiety.

"Mr. Harmer, you'll do," said the former; "but I must find some one to nurse you. Where's Mrs. Heffernan?"

"Minding the other poor lads that's nearly killed," said the old man.

"Boynton," said the other to him, suddenly, "how's your daughter by this time?"

"Badly, sir, badly. Margaret don't seem to know hardly that she's safe among friends. She does nothing but moan and weep. I hardly dared to leave her for this few minutes."

"Stay here, then, I'll go to her;" and the doctor hastily left the hut.

Now this doctor was a wise though a young man. He had seen trouble and sorrow before to-day, and knew how there was one sure method of relief. Entering the hut where

the girl sat crouching, with hidden face, her whole form trembling with still unsubdued excitement, he approached her softly, and laying his hand gently upon her shoulder, called her by her name. She looked up shuddering, her fair face ghastly pale, her bright eyes quenched in tears, and her beautiful golden hair wildly straying over her.

"Margaret," said the doctor, kindly, "you know that a great trouble has fallen upon us all?"

"No, no, I have no memory but for yesterday—no knowledge of to-day," was the agonized reply.

"There has great trouble come; there is grief for others besides those dear to you. Listen to me, my dear, the time has come for you to rouse yourself, and be merciful as only woman can. In our fight—you heard firing in the night?—men were stricken down and lie upon painful couches, looking for kind words and pitying eyes. I want your help."

The girl looked earnestly at him, while a new expression dawned upon her beautiful features.

"My help," she whispered.

"Your help. One of these poor creatures is a young gentleman who came here to visit his friend, who commands this fort. He needs all that we can do for him. Be to him a ministering angel, and let your charity to him in his extremity be a healing balm for your own sorrow."

She rose up instantly.

"Lead me to him," she said.

It was a sad spectacle which the young girl had come to witness. The prostrate figure of a human being, suddenly stricken into helplessness is always appalling; but to see a young and handsome man, who but a short time before had been the life and soul of his associates, lying with bandaged form and blood-stained garments, unable to speak above a whisper, and too feeble to raise a hand, is terrible. But, Margaret Boynton paused not for any outpourings of sentiment or useless expressions of sympathy. Her work was there before her. Stooping tenderly over the sufferer, with gentle hands she smoothed his pillow, and imparted the magic feeling of rest which he had not before felt. Then dipping her handkerchief into water she passed it softly across his feverish brow

and as she did so his eyes opened languidly, and gazed into her own.

Those were deep, earnest, loving eyes which met his look—full of simple affection and pity; and, feeble as he was, there passed between the two an electric flame, which should never be quenched on this side the grave. What the new-born feeling that bound them together might be, neither questioned, but a gracious peace seemed to spread her wings over the pair and to wrap them in silent happiness.

But there was a life to preserve, death to keep at bay. And well and faithfully did Margaret keep watch and ward over her charge. For three days and nights she scarcely left him; for three days and nights no hands but hers held the blessed water that he craved to his lips; no hands but hers were tenderly laid upon his brain. The mercy of the Lord shone round about them, and with a rain of grateful tears she heard that he was saved—saved from the lonely burial that her people had met—saved, perchance, that she might live for and love him alone!

CHAPTER IV

IN BONDS AND OUT.

THE party which had departed in search of Captain Kessler, had no easy task before it. A fierce and treacherous foe, well armed by the artifices of traders as treacherous as themselves, were in front of Job Dean and his brave companions. Open force was impossible, stratagem full of danger. But, the rescue had to be effected, and not one of those brave Americans but would die rather than fail or think of failure.

We shall leave them for a while, however, and follow the captain himself as he is borne away through the darkness, an Indian blanket thrown over his head, and his arms tied so tightly behind him that his bands cut into his quivering flesh. Captain Kessler was a brave man, and not a heartquake could

be charged against him by his worst enemy as he was hurried away, he knew not whither. Hurried away on foot at first, but not for long, then lifted by powerful arms, whose owners broke into a long, swinging trot, that was swift, though noiseless. For over an hour he was thus transported and then he felt himself lifted, thrown, and the next moment was flung upon the ground. The minute after the blanket was torn from him, and he saw his captors.

What a circle of whirling, crowding, leaping savages! Not a gleam of mercy in the face of one of them, but only the call for blood, blood!

It was by this time nearly daylight, and just possible to discern objects at some little distance. But, no living creature was to be seen within the horizon, and the captive knew that in God alone lay the power to save him from a fearful death.

There was little time to think of this, for the Indians, quite silently as before, formed themselves into two bodies of about a hundred each. One party disappearing into some thickets returned with a dozen horses, upon one of which he was lifted, and firmly bound to a warrior who was mounted before him. Then his feet were tied under the horse's belly, and he was as helpless as if encompassed by bands of steel. One party then started at a rapid pace with him in their midst, while the others appeared to be, for some reason, intent upon remaining behind. With these latter, however, we have little concern; they only formed a kind of rear-guard, and joined the main body almost immediately upon the latter's arrival at its destination.

The spot upon which the Indians at length encamped was situated about a hundred miles from where the start had been, and the journey occupied nearly three days. It was admirably adapted for shelter and for hiding. A natural clearing surrounded by old forest-trees gave ample space for the warriors, and the envioning shade afforded lurking-places for their scouts and shelter for their horses. Already many squaws and children were crowded here and there, and many a black face peered forth curiously from beneath the folds of rude tents smeared with still ruder Indian devices. One tent, larger than the rest, evidently was that of the chief, and it

was pitched alone at one side of the clearing. Grouped about it were several women, and a few warriors were listlessly standing at a little distance.

The return of the expedition had been expected for some hours, and there had been much excitement in consequence. It was not until afternoon that a runner, suddenly darting in from the forest, announced their immediate arrival. The whole crowd yelled with delight, and as no white man knows how. Presently, with an answering yell, the warriors came trooping in, in their midst a horse, upon which one rode, having behind him, bound tightly, the figure of a soldier.

If the presence of the Indian warriors caused every woman and child to almost shriek with joy, the presence also of a prisoner was a source of deeper exultation. There would be something for all to see presently, which would be an object for gloating with ferocious eagerness. The poor captive now lying upon the ground, was in their eyes a something to spurn, and torture, and finally destroy. Such cruelties as they could inflict would be inflicted, and at the prospect of so horrible an entertainment, even the men, habitually reserved and stoical, could not repress a stern and savage joy.

The first emotion which Henry Kessler had experienced when he felt himself borne away from his comrades was of a rage almost past endurance. Now he felt that hope was dead, and there was nothing but absurdity in mere anger. Half dead with exhaustion, hunger, and thirst, his arms and ankles cut and swollen, his whole body cramped and in pain, he hardly wished for any other fate than a merciful death. That it would be neither merciful nor speedy he knew, but he would bear himself bravely until the end. He would, if nature would give him aid, die like a man.

He was not long left to his own reflections however, for immediately a ravenous feast was commenced, and he was placed in the midst of a knot of the revelers. They untied his hands, and flung him scraps of their coarse dried-meat, and put a vessel of water within his reach. "We make you eat," grunted one, "you die soon enough without starve."

It was with great difficulty that he could swallow, but the drink was grateful to his parched throat. For, all the time of his deadly ride hardly any thing had been given him by

his captors. But he managed to eat a few morsels, and felt revived even to the extent of wondering whether escape were possible. He well knew that the garrison could not pursue in force. He knew that there were brave and devoted hearts beating for him, but with despair rather than hope. He knew how vigilant the tribe would be over himself, and in all that host of lowering faces there was no look of pity, no, not one.

The savage feast continued for some time, and became, as usual, a filthy orgie before it was ended. The vile traders' whisky made some mad, and others mere wallowing beasts, and more than once the stern voice of the chief, Wa-me-day-wah-kee, or War Eagle, and the efforts of some of the old men, were hardly sufficient to prevent the prisoner's instant murder.

At length the greater number were hideously drunk and helpless, and the few that were capable began to secure the prisoner for the night. Replacing the thongs of hide by which his hands had been bound, they dragged him close to a large tree, and securely fastened him to the trunk by longer strips, which they passed round his body at least a dozen times. He was thus left standing. They then flung themselves on the ground in a circle. The misery of such a situation can hardly be realized. For the long hours of the night he stood thus, and when, as it did several times, faintness stole over him, the tension caused by his sinking forward nearly drove him mad with agony.

It was not until the sun was blazing high in the heavens that they released him.

The tribe evidently meant that their victim should feel all the pangs of suspense as well as of physical torture. As on the evening before, he was allowed to eat and drink, sparingly, while they again broke their own fast. This over, they assembled in a large circle and spoke eagerly among themselves for a brief space, and smoking at the same time. Then a sign was made to the warriors who guarded him, and he was placed in the middle of the circle, and left there alone, still securely bound. The squaws and children of all ages formed a dusky framework of the scene, and a Babel of angry voices betokened their hatred and malice.

The warriors were silent, however, and looked at him gravely for some time. Then the chief, a gigantic warrior, whose ferocious aspect was heightened by the smears of black and red paint, with which his face and body were ornamented, slowly rose, dropping his blanket from his massive shoulders as he did so.

Standing at his full height and scowling fiercely at the prisoner, he crossed his arms over his chest, and spoke, in a thick, hoarse voice. "Look at me. I am Wa-me-day-wah-kee. I am a great chief. These are my young men and braves. They know me. They have seen my hands red in battle. Why shall they not be red with your blood?"

Kessler knew that any reply would precipitate his fate. The Indian is just as fond of speech-making as the white man, and whatever oration the chief desired would be for his own gratification chiefly. He preserved, therefore, an entire silence, and an unflinching aspect.

"See," continued the speaker, "not long ago there were more braves with me. Where are they? What have you done with them? Where are our hunting-grounds now? Do we not starve because of you? See, you promised us guns and powder, and many things. You said to us if we go away we shall have presents. Your people bring presents and then steal them away. You shoot my braves, and then tell lies, and say they began it. We are hunted like foxes, then if we turn you kill us. Speak. Is it not true?"

During the utterance of these words the chief had been rather anxious to draw forth some denial from the prisoner. Although at first determined not to gratify him, the captain at this point shook his head and uttered an emphatic "No." The effect was instantaneous.

"Liar and dog," yelled the chief. "Listen then. The great father at Washington promised me and my young men money and axes and blankets every year. Each of us so much. And then came to the station at your fort agents. Did they bring all these things? No. Did they bring all the axes and the blankets and powder? No. They stole half of it. Then we got the rest, and then they gave us fire-water and made us drunk and took all back, and all that we brought with us besides. And they shot some, and when we shot too

they killed more of us. And we were sent away hungry and naked. Did you stop this? No. For your men shot also, and many are with the Great Spirit who before were with us on the hunting-grounds and at the council-fire. Then we said we would have war. All of us left said we would kill all of you we could. Good. We will kill you."

There was much more of a similar kind, which we need not repeat—in fact, the assemblage soon degenerated into a mere yelling, shrieking crowd, eager to begin the work of death. The preparations were sufficiently appalling. A large fire of brush and logs was kindled in the middle of the space, and Kessler was brought toward it. Next he was about being stripped of his clothes, but at the same moment an interruption occurred which seemed unaccountable. It was soon explained, however, by the sudden appearance of an Indian, who had evidently been traveling at great speed and appeared exhausted. He immediately began a hurried conversation with the chief warriors, and pointed eagerly to the east. That his news was important could at once be seen, for the whole encampment seemed to become greatly excited. Kessler could not guess its import, but the probability was that hostilities were threatened, from some unknown quarter. At all events there was more important business on hand than his execution, for shortly afterward he was taken into a tent and left bound as before, four Indians remaining with him and keeping close watch. As he was thrust through the narrow entrance he could see parties of three or four each rapidly departing by different directions into the surrounding forest.

The guard left with him were four in number, and a truculent-looking set they were. Kessler tried to converse with them, but they touched their knives significantly and made no answer. The day was long and dreary—hour after hour the Indians sat and smoked, or conversed among themselves in low tones. Food was brought by a squaw toward evening. She handed some to each in turn and to Kessler last of all. She was not distinguishable in the obscurity from the other women of the tribe, and yet Kessler felt a mysterious thrill as she approached him for which he could not account. Contrary to what might have been expected, moreover, she did not stop to revile him, as many others had done, but quietly

placed the food by his side. It consisted simply of dried flesh as before, and some water in an earthen cup. In a moment afterward she appeared to discover that his tied hands could not take the food, and turning spoke to the other occupants of the tent, evidently entreating them to loosen the thongs. She seemed to have much influence with them, and after some hesitation on their part she returned and untied one hand. As she did so Kessler felt a strong and distinct pressure. Then she raised a piece of the meat and closed the hand over it tightly but without a word. There was some covert meaning in this pressure, and the most probable one was that the meat was not to be eaten but carefully preserved. The woman indeed glanced at him from time to time, sitting in a corner of the tent, and when he, having watched for an opportunity, placed it in his breast, she gave an almost imperceptible nod and immediately went away.

The day wore on, and without change. The usual sounds of chattering squaws and children at their rude games continued. It was not until dusk that the warriors returned to their lodges, which they did in parties as they had left them. What had occasioned their absence was unknown to Kessler, but it was not likely to alter his fate one way or the other.

This night as on the previous one there was a wild scene of drunkenness and debauchery. The only difference was that his guards were changed often, and that he was not brought out into the open air. The arrival of each relief-guard seemed to mark the progress of general intoxication among the crowd, for each new party was in a more beastly condition than the last. At length, as brave after brave was overcome, the encampment became more still, until the whole scene displayed but an occasional dusky form gliding to and fro, while within the tent lay the prisoner with four tipsy savages whose efforts to keep awake grew momentarily more difficult. Sometimes they threw a sleepy look at their charge, but not for long. Meanwhile his hand had been left untied by the first party who had been set to watch him, and as he had kept it carefully in the same position as when bound, the subsequent parties had not discovered the omission.

Thus matters stood until nearly midnight, by which time all the four savages snored in concert, and a vision of possible

escape began to dawn upon the captain's mind. First he cautiously made one or two slight movements, to see if they would attract attention. They did not. Then he very stealthily drew from his breast the piece of dried flesh, and examined it by pressure. It would not bend! It really concealed something then! Soon he discovered what this something was, for he found a thin, narrow bit of sharpened steel imbedded in the flesh. This substitute for a knife was not two inches long, but its edge was keen; and with a great leap of his heart the captain saw that his bonds could be cut, and that of all his captors there was one who pitied him and would set him free.

To sever the ligatures, even in that darkened hut, was a work of danger, but he did it. Still more dangerous was it to assume a more easy position, but by degrees he did that also. But all this was but of little avail, for the savages who lay snoring within a few feet were not the only enemies which he had to fear. Doubtless the first movement of escape, even if he had been well armed, would have resulted only in a hard fight and summary killing. Still, thought he, better far to risk even this than to lie, a doomed man, until at most another day would be the end of all. True he was weak. But his heart was strong. He would try, and God alone knew the issue.

Raising himself cautiously upon one elbow he listened. There was no suspicion of him so far. The next thought was to move along an inch at a time until he could gradually slide beneath the edge of the tent.

Suddenly a touch on his arm made his blood run cold, and then course tumultuously through his veins. Nothing was visible to him, for the hand which now grasped his arm was from behind him as he lay with his back to the tent's edge. The grasp, however, tightened, and the hand pulled gently the arm toward its owner, whoever that might be. There could be no doubt that the woman was his friend; it must be she who now crouched outside the tent and meant to save him.

Not a whisper escaped either, while, with suspended breath, Kessler followed by almost imperceptible degrees the warning, stealthy motion of the hand, which seemed to caution him to move as glidingly and silently as the snake. Every

thing depended, as he well knew, upon the gradual nature of his movements. Every movement might be his last for liberty. Half an hour passed in dragging himself to the tent's edge, and getting his head beneath it, and another half-hour before he had finally emerged, still crawling, and found a muffled form, still holding his arm, extended outside.

Not till then did a voice reach him. In a whisper, the figure said only, "Follow me, as I move."

He did so. Both glided prostrate along the grass until they reached the nearest woods, and then upon their hands and knees for over a hundred yards. Then, rising slightly, the strange companion of the captain's flight grasped his hand lightly, and led him, both crouching low, swiftly and silently away.

At first at a quick walk, then at a run, they sped along. It must have been two miles distant that the muffled figure first paused.

"Thank God," the stranger said. "Now, thank God."

"From the bottom of my heart," devoutly answered the captain. "And you, brave stranger—"

"Speak not of me. See yonder thicket. Come there with me, and find deliverance."

Without another word the two advanced, and found two horses tied, and all things necessary for a rapid, dangerous journey.

Quick as thought both were mounted, and cautiously moving out, at a walk at first, and after about a mile at full gallop.

Oh, the glorious freedom of that moonlight ride! Life, dear life, its object, death left behind.

Not for two hours did the riders draw rein. Several times Kessler would have spoken, but was waved to silence. At last, when all fear of pursuit was almost over, he said:

"Strange woman—"

"You know me for a woman, then? I was one once. Not as you thought me—not of that accursed tribe."

"No, those are merciless. I felt that you were not of them."

"My story is a common one. There is no time to tell it now. Enough that I am gently born, am white like you, have been for years a slave to fiends—"

"You were captured, then?"

"I was, a child at the time. They killed all my people, but were not unkind to me. Their chief would have made me his head wife when I was old enough, and so I grew up with the tribe, by degrees becoming one of them in all but their villanies."

"But you had seen captives slain before, and why help me?"

"I can not tell you why, save that my soul revolted more and more against my captors. Longing for freedom, I dared not attempt escape. At last my fate was nearly arrived—before another month I should have been taken to the wigwam of Wa-me-day-wah-kee, and I resolved rather to die. That was the bitter alternative, and I was prepared to meet it. Then you were brought in, and I swore that both of us should be free or I would die with you."

"Heaven will reward you, lady. My whole life's gratitude can not repay you."

"No more of that. We are not saved yet, remember. Hush, what is that?"

They had been walking their horses during this brief conversation, and had not noticed particularly the route which they were traveling. Now, however, they suddenly paused and looked closely around, Kessler asking in a whisper what caused his companion's alarm.

Her only reply was to fling him her bridle, and, springing to the ground, laid her ear upon the turf.

"Horses," she almost gasped. "Get off and listen, thus."

He did so.

"What do you hear?" asked she.

"I, too, hear horses' feet. Their dull trample upon the earth is distinct, though far off."

"Then we are lost. See here: if we are once more in those red devils' hands, I have one blade for myself. Will you have one for me too?"

"How?—shall we not fight?"

"'Tis useless. Promise, promise to lay me dead at your feet, and then, better, oh better far turn your knife's point toward yourself."

"I promise," said Kessler, solemnly. "But, let us mount and fly."

But a new expression dawned upon the woman's face as she again bent her ear to the ground. From mingled terror and resolve, she changed to hope.

"They are not Indians," she almost sobbed. "You, a soldier, not know the tread!"

It was true. With a bursting heart the captain recognized the steady tramp of cavalry on the march, and knew that his own gallant soldiers were not far off. Quick as thought, both remounted and rode toward the sounds that made such joyful music.

CHAPTER V.

ON TRAIL.

LEAVING the captain for a while, we will follow the little party who had started from the fort in pursuit. The greatest caution was of course necessary. Their journey lay through a country which offered continual opportunities for sudden surprises, and every thicket might swarm with enemies. The order of march was as follows: A single horseman rode at about a hundred yards from the main body, and the trapper kept up a continual reconnoiter a little in advance of him, and carefully examining the trail as he went along. There was no difficulty in effecting the latter service, for the passage of so numerous a body could not be concealed even by the most wary Indians. Indeed, little pains had been taken for concealment. In this manner the soldiers proceeded for several hours, without incident. There was little or no speaking—the purpose of the ride was too exciting, and the anxiety felt by all too deep for many words.

Forty miles had been traversed, and the horses showed signs of fatigue which must not be disregarded. A halt was called therefore, and the party picketing them, proceeded to attack their rations with what appetite they could. Meanwhile Job Dean, whose gaunt frame was as hard as steel, declared that rest for him was just about the stiffest kind of work, and so he'd take a look round for a while.

"A tree ain't a bad sort of look-out," he said to himself, "so up I goes."

Suiting the action to the word, he nimbly climbed one of the tallest within sight, and from his leafy ambush gazed as far as his eyes could reach. Nothing rewarded his searching gaze, and he slowly descended, with a graver look upon his features than before.

"Tell ye what 'tis, boys," said he, on returning to his companions, "it's my belief that we've got a long job afore us, and that the captain's pretty fur away by this time. I'm a-going to alter this plan a little—just let me think it out a bit."

"The troopers are under your orders, Mr. Dean," said a young sergeant, the only non-commissioned officer present. "What you say we shall do."

"Well, bide a bit," replied Dean, who withdrew a few yards and began to pace slowly up and down with folded arms, and an expression of deep thought upon his bronzed face. The soldiers watched him earnestly. The tall, wiry form was so full of power, every motion so suggestive of ready and vast strength, that he would have caused any one to gaze long and curiously at him.

For about ten minutes he thus deliberated. At last, as if a sudden resolution had been taken, he strode into their midst and said :

"I'm going to leave you, boys. This here business is fitter for me than all of you put together, and I can do it better by myself."

"What, Dean? You must be joking or mad," exclaimed the sergeant.

"Young man," said the other, "I seldom joke, and never when a friend's in trouble. Whether I'm mad or not, there's only One who knows. May be I am, but so's most every one, it's said. Anyhow, what I've said I've said. Now listen."

There was no mistaking those decided tones. The men closed round him and silently gave him their whole attention.

"When I said I was going on by myself, I didn't mean you to turn back. But, I want a good hour's start of you. You keep together, and follow these tracks as we've done so far. I shall be in 'em too, only ahead. If I want you I shall wait till you come up, but when you see a blazed trunk or a pulled-

up bush right afore you, you'll know it's me, and that all goes well."

"All right then," replied the sergeant. "It wants four hours of sundown. We shall camp then, I suppose?"

"At sundown I shall be with you. Wait here one hour, then start."

With these words he left them, and as he desired they followed when the time indicated had expired.

The trapper had a motive for this line of conduct which may be easily explained. He knew perfectly well that in all probability the Indians had left some few scouts to watch for any pursuing force. So long as the party of soldiers were together they could not elude the observation of these scouts; in fact, they would almost certainly be heard at some considerable distance. But, alone, he could secretly advance and meet the stealthy foe in his own manner. It would be time enough to call up the whole party when open fighting had to be undertaken.

Leaving the trail from time to time, first on one side and then on the other, but never for any considerable time, he began now to examine the traces to be met with, more closely than before. He kept as much as possible within the shadow of trees also, and when an open space had to be crossed, glided over it with great speed, seeking the next shelter immediately. In this way he moved along, and not a sign of the savages escaped his attention. He mounted trees occasionally too, and scanned the horizon earnestly. This process continued for over two hours, but without result. The job was to be a long one, however, as he had expressed it, and two hours was not much time to have lost.

"And yet," he muttered to himself, as he stood leaning upon the muzzle of his rifle, "And yet it's awful danger for the captain; if he gets out of it—still, I've had my chances too, and there's always hope while there's life."

So saying he took an enormous chunk of tobacco from his pouch, and thrust it into his cheek with a grunt, as if there was comfort in the weed anyhow. Shouldering, then, his piece, he began his march again.

At this point the timber was scattered irregularly in clumps of a dozen trees together, with thick underbrush between

them. "Pretty rough place," he thought, "for honest folks, and red-skins anywhere near."

A true enough remark, for the thought had hardly crossed his mind when a sharp crack echoed through the forest, and a ball, whizzing by his head, left a deep furrow in the hair of his hunting-cap.

Quick as lightning Dean leaped toward the nearest tree and climbed into its topmost boughs. The maneuver served its purpose, for, looking closely around, he saw the little puff of blue smoke for which he watched, slowly rise a hundred yards off and drift away into space.

"Ah! this is better sport than I've had for years," he said, with a grim smile overspreading his hardy features. "The game's begun, has it? Well, I'm ready."

To descend was the work of a few seconds, and, snatching the rifle which he had laid down, he quietly waited, completely hidden by the brushwood into which he crouched.

There could not be more than two Indians, perhaps but one, he thought. Time would show. One or the other must play a first card he knew, and he would not be that one. Half an hour passed, the trapper's keen ears listening, and his keen eyes watching. Presently he saw a slight motion in a bush not above twenty yards off, and kept his glance upon it. The motion was hardly more than some wild animal might make, but, whatever was the cause the trapper's rifle, hidden among the leaves of his own covert, pointed straight and true. Suddenly the leaves rustled again, and then as a report rung clear and loud, a form leaped into the air and fell headlong down. Two shots were fired almost at the same instant from close by the prostrate figure, and two Indians came bounding forward to where Dean knelt low.

It was to be a fight now. But Dean was prepared. His revolver was leveled at the foremost man in a second, and the trigger pulled. It missed fire! "Blast the thing," he muttered, and then flung it with all his force at the Indian. Clear between his eyes it took him, and he rolled over like a log, completely stunned. Seeing this the other savage paused, clubbing his rifle. The two men gazed at each other for a brief space and then leveled tremendous blows at each other. It was a clumsy kind of warfare, as the Indian seemed to

think, however, for flinging the weapon away he rushed upon the trapper with his knife gleaming in his hand.

This, too, suited Job Dean, who closed with a sort of stern glee upon his antagonist, his own blade ready for the fatal stroke. The Indian at once made a fearful lunge upon the other, but was caught by the arm with a vice-like grasp, his own hand, however, similarly held by the other's left. Thus they stood looking into each other's faces, and a stalwart pair they were. But each began the struggle to release himself, and it was long and fierce. They bent to and fro like twined snakes, and their muscles strained with all their might. But the trapper's right hand slowly pressed the Indian's gradually back until the point reached his breast. The blade bit deep, until the heart's blood gushed forth, and, all his body relaxing, the Indian sunk dead upon the ground.

Thus, two were killed and the other past fighting. The heavy revolver had either cracked the skull of the third outright or administered a headache that it would take some time to get over.

The victor stood looking at him gravely for awhile as he lay breathing heavily. "What's to be done? I never did slay one of the varmints when he was helpless, but, I ain't sure I oughtn't to put this one past mischief. If I leave him he may come to in a little, and put the whole tribe on to me. No, 'tis best make sure, and if it's wrong, why God forgive me."

It was wrong, Job Dean, but the rough life you led was not much of a training school for humanity, and your lights were but the lights of Judge Lynch's kindling. We must not be severe with him, if he did, not without a guilty look upon his face, send his prostrate foe into another world with one quick and powerful stab.

"Now, I'll wait for the so'gers," said he, after reloading his rifle, wiping his knife, and recapping his revolver. Presently the boys came along steadily and quietly, and to them he showed the three dusky forms of what had been men. They were considerably astonished of course, and gazed long upon the prostrate bodies and their conqueror, who stood a little apart, leaning upon his rifle, without a spark of the exultation of victory on his sunburnt face.

"Boys," said he, "I fout 'em fair, and licked. That cuss there," pointing to the last savage who had succumbed to his prowess, "that cuss there was laid right along, with maybe a broken skull and maybe not. Maybe he played 'possum, maybe not. I druv my knife into him as he would hev druv his into me, and if it wa'n't fair play to do that—well, he's dead, and so let's be movin'!"

The march was at once resumed, and as before the trapper passed ahead, though this time he contented himself with moving about a quarter of a mile in front of the soldiers. He argued, and justly, that whatever Indian scouts covered the rear of the main body of the savages were now disposed of, and that in all probability no more obstructions of that nature were to be expected.

CHAPTER VI.

AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

LET us leave, for awhile, the little party who were tracking their lost captain, and return to the frontier station where we left Harmer Dorlon in the care of his new friend, nay, more than friend, Margaret Boynton.

That the two young people, thrown together by the accident of war, should take a far deeper interest in each other than would be called forth by an intercourse carried on in crowded drawing-rooms, or in the varied pleasures of fashion and her votaries, was natural; more, it was inevitable. There was, besides, on the girl's part, the double emotion of grief for what she had lost, and pity for what she saw before her. Dorlon was a young man who would catch the eye and please the fancy of any girl whose heart still was free. But, when he lay helpless before her, when his eyes, closed for long, opened at last as though a dream was all that lay before them; when his feeble hand tried in vain to raise itself to her, and the tongue refused to frame a single word, she had been full of pity, indeed.

As soldiers in battle stop not to mourn over those of **their** comrades whom they miss in the headlong charge or the **fierce** assault, so heavenly pity, chief ornament of gentle woman, stays not to weep tears that avail not for the lost, but moves tenderly to aid and to console those who remain. It is the word of soldier and of saint—Duty! Time enough, when duty has been done, to turn a lingering look behind. It is after the battle is over that we go out, with spade and lantern, to bury our beloved dead.

We have already said they loved each other; but no word had yet been spoken by either, of that love. Pure as the violet, sweet as the honeycomb, it needed little skill to read the language of those downcast eyes. Nor could she doubt why, when he spoke to her, there was a strange tenderness, an almost trembling tenderness, whose tones she had never heard before.

The old man—was he blind, or would he not see, thought Harmer? But, he was not blind, and he intended to see just as far as possible into this new phase of his daughter's life. The subject was full of anxiety for several reasons. In the first place, the very idea of Margaret, his "Polly," having now, in their desolate condition, any love to spare for any other than her father, was painful to him in the extreme. Then, again, who and what was Harmer? Did he mean the girl well?

"Mrs. Heffernan," said he, one evening, as he sat watching her put the finishing touches to a smart bonnet, "what do you think about it?"

"Save the man! Is it what am I thinking about, Mister Boynton?" replied the portly, good-hearted woman.

"Well, you see yonder hut?"

"'Deed I do, whin ye're not blocking up the door atune the hut an' my eyesight."

"You know who lies there, or rather now sits up there, and will soon be well enough to walk out of there?"

"See, now, Mr. Boynton, I'm not good at riddles; but I think I guess your meaning; anyhow, speak your mind. Is it ab-ut the girl?"

"God help and bless her, yes."

"And what is it that ye fear?"

"Every thing, friend, and yet—"

"Oh, bother with your nonsense! Sure, they're as purty a couple as ever danced on a barn-door in the dear ould isle we left behind us."

"They are; but, beauty is a scare, and youth unheeding."

"Mister Boynton, I'd have you know that our captain has no rapscaillions among the muster-roll of *his* friends," replied she, angrily.

"No, I did not mean to say that he had. Forgive me if I seemed to doubt the honor of young Dorlon."

"Forgive! It's forgotten already. As for the young man, I'd go bail for him; and small blame to him if he does lose his heart, even if your daughter finds it."

"But, there is more in this than you think. They may learn to love each other; nay, look and tell me if they do not already."

The rosy dame looked over his shoulder, as he pointed. Truly a pretty sight was that she saw. The hut door, opened wide, showed all within its folds; a dim twilight had begun to gather round, and within there was a lantern hanging, whose rays beamed softly down upon the youthful pair. He was sitting on a pile of blankets which were heaped around him, and supported his weak body as comfortably as a mother's arms. A smile was on his face, and he gazed into hers; she, seated at his feet upon the ground, rested her hand timidly upon his which lay upon his knee. It was love that shone in the faces of both, love that spoke in every attitude and gesture. You could almost fancy you heard the low voice of tenderness with which he was speaking to her.

The old man looked at them long and eagerly, lost as it were in a silent trance from which he could not rouse himself. But he turned suddenly round as Mrs. Heffernan laid her trembling hand upon his shoulder.

"Holy angels guard them," she whispered in a broken voice, as tears filled her eyes. "It's our young days back again I see over there. Can you look on them unmoved?"

"No, no more than you; but, she is all in all to me; she's a good girl, too."

"Let her be happy as well, then."

"That's just what I would do. But, see here, Mrs. Heffer nan, that young man is a gentleman, doubtless, and a scholar. How would his friends look upon the humble bride that he brought them from the wilderness?"

"Well, now, that's the quarest thing of all. When Tom and meself fixed up to come to this new land, he said that here was liberty, that here all were equal. I was glad to come where I could be what I'd a right to be—as good as any of them. Was I wrong?"

"Certainly not; on the contrary, you were perfectly right."

"Just so. Now, Mr. Boynton, ye's a Yankee, born an' bred?"

"I am so, born and bred."

"And ye believe in the talk of your countrymen on this equality?"

"I hope so; but this case is different."

"There is no difference in it. A young fellow and a girl that love each other are on the same level before their God and before the world, too, if the world has any sinse or feeling."

"They ought to be, I know."

"They are, even if she was taken from a mud cabin, and he a king wid his goolden crown upon his head."

"The world is hard, madam; it does not judge as we would judge."

"True for you; it is hard; but she would be the angel of any man's house, the star of any man's path, however high he is."

"Still I must talk with her."

"That's only proper. The confidence she gives you will make her happier and safer too."

"And shall I talk to him, too?"

"No; time enough; but, stay, I'll help ye in this, or my name's not Bridget. I'll talk to him myself—that is if it's plasin' to ye."

"Indeed, indeed, I thank you. Find out all you can, and take a father's gratitude."

The shrewd Irishwoman was as kind as she was sensible in her offer to ascertain for herself and Polly's father how the

land lay in respect to Harmer Dorlon. That young man might or might not be in love with his fair nurse. There was plenty of true love in the world, but, alas, many imitating the real article. That Polly loved him was beyond the shadow of a doubt, but was he acting merely the rôle of adorer.

"Men is but deceivin' creturs," said Mrs. Heffernan to herself. But then a smile came over her face as she remembered that her Tom was no deceiver, and that other women might be as well mated as herself. Thus reflecting, she entered the hut where the young people were.

"Good-evenin' to ye, Mr. Harmer. It's getting hearty and strong ye are already, as can be seen plainly enough."

"Many thanks, yes. My kind friend here, may I not call her my dear nurse, has taken as much care of me as if I belonged to her."

"We all belong to each other in time of tronble, young man," gravely replied the older woman.

"A true doctrine, but not often followed," laughed he in reply. "Seriously, I owe her a debt of gratitude that I shall die without paying, I think, if I live to be a hundred."

"There you are wrong again. You can pay her in your heart's feelings, in your honorable dealing toward others, if you never see her again."

"God forbid that we should ever—"

"Margaret, you are tired," hastily interrupted the trooper's wife. "I came to give you a chance to rest a bit; so be off out of this, quick."

"Indeed, I need no rest," replied Polly, eagerly.

"Indeed and indeed yourself, then. Master Dorlon will spare ye till to-morrow morning, and I'll sit wid him an hour or two to-night."

"I really couldn't—" began Harmer.

"Of course not, honey; but, the order's posted, and has to be obeyed. Good-night, Polly."

"Must I—"

"Good-night, Polly."

"But—"

"Good-night, Polly."

"Well, I must go, I suppose, so I will. Good-by, sir."

"Shake hands, then. Stay, I want to whisper something to you."

As she bent down over him, he drew her gently lower, and kissed her tenderly.

Mrs. Heffernan, strangely enough, had turned her back at that precise moment, but we think she heard a little sound as of lips meeting, and we know, that with a broad smile all over her face, she absently touched her own with her strong hand. But there was to be no more of this, as there would have been, perhaps, if she had not turned round again and laughingly pushed the girl out of the door.

"Haven't ye a kiss for me, my dear?" she archly demanded. But Polly half laughed, half cried as she whispered:

"Not to-night, dear Mrs. Heffernan, for a reason that I have."

Once the girl gone, the woman became silent and grave. Seating herself on a low stool at a little distance from Dorlon, she pulled out her knitting-needles, and began to work steadily.

"Why, what's the matter?" said he at length, after having looked at her wonderingly for some time.

"Nothing—that is, nothing that you care for."

"How can I tell if I do not know what it is?"

"That's true enough. But it doesn't concern you, any way."

"You only make me more curious. Is it any thing in which I can help you?"

"Help me! There's not a living soul, except Tom, that I'd ask for help. Bridget Heffernan has so far got along without being under obligation to any one, young man."

"I was sure of it, but I thought I'd ask. Does any one else need help that I can give?"

"There is one who needs it badly. Mr. Boynton has to bear an awful calamity."

"I know, I know, and I pity him with my whole heart."

"He has lost all who loved him, except the dear girl who was with you just now."

A faint blush overspread Dorlon's face, but he answered, calmly:

"That is true, also — miserably true. How does he seem?"

"Sadly enough. It is a total break up for him. The savages not only took the life of his loved ones, but carried away or destroyed all that he had to start him with in this wilderness of a place."

"What does he propose to do? If money—"

"That's it; if some friend would lend him—"

"Lend! I'll give him what he wants as freely as if he was my brother."

"I knew you would if you were able. He would stay hereabout where there will be some protection, for a year or two at least, if he takes my advice; but, he wants to be away—he says the place is cursed."

"To go East again?"

"No, I think South."

"And she?"

"Will be with him of course. What else did you dream of?"

"She must not, nor must he."

"Hoity toity; you would be giving your orders, would ye? But they are nothing to you, and when they leave this you will never see either of them again. Ah, 'tis a purty girl she is, and he's a fine old man."

"Mrs. Heffernan—"

"Hadn't you better take some sleep, honey?"

"Sleep be—"

"Well, if ye're going to talk like that, I'll leave you, Mr. Harmer. Sure it's the fever's got into your head again."

"Don't leave me. I beg you to stay."

"And ye'll commence your nap at once?"

"No. But, I sadly want to talk to you."

"Me! of all creatures in the world. But I'll listen to ye."

"Mrs. Heffernan, I love that girl."

"Then it's more than ever right she should never set her eyes on you again. You've never told her this?"

"I have. And she returns my love."

"I am very sorry for it," said she, earnestly.

"What on earth do you mean? Isn't it enough that we understand each other?"

"Do you understand yourself? See here, Dorlon Harmer, I'll be plain wid ye. You have been thrown in this girl's way, or she has been thrown in yours, at a time when she was bound down with a heavy affliction. She found some consolation in tending you as you lay there wounded, an' perhaps to die. 'Twasn't unnatural that her heart opened to you. As for you, away from home, among strangers, no woman's face besides hers except my own near you, your heart opened to her. Is that it?"

"Well, there's truth in that; but I should have loved her anywhere, and under any circumstances."

"Don't be so sure of it. You've fancied many a pretty girl before, if I don't mistake the nature of you young men."

"On my honor, no. I never did. As she is my first love, so will she be my last."

"And your parents—they're rich I'm told?"

"Tolerably so."

"And what people call genteel."

"You make me laugh. Well, yes, they *are* of old and highly respectable families."

"And d'ye think they will be over pleased when they find out how the visit to the poor captain has ended?"

"No matter if they are not. My mind is made up. She will be my wife."

"If you mean this, young man; if you are true to her in spite of all the world, Bridget Heffernan's blessing will go with you wherever you are. Have you spoke to her father?"

"I shall as soon as I see him."

"Another thing—he'll be lonely without her. Doesn't it seem hard? See what he suffers now."

"You do not suppose that I am such a brute as to propose separating them?"

"Again my blessing on you."

"Of course time must pass before we can be married. The grief must have time to soften before we can be happy. Meanwhile the sooner I speak to Mr. Boynton the better. But, good-night now; you must be tired, and I need nothing."

"Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

And they were pleasant dreams, in which his pain and

wounds were forgotten, and a fair young form held him company through pleasant valleys, and by the side of silvery streams, that murmured tales of love in the imagination of the sleeper.

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT SCOUT.

It was now the third day of the pursuit and daylight was coming to a close. For the soldiers to have proceeded in the darkness would have been rash even if possible, and preparations were therefore made to halt until the dawn. This enforced idleness worried the boys sadly, however. They did not, could not, know but every hour might be the last of their beloved captain. They could not tell but by this time the council-fire had been succeeded by the torture and the murder. Not a man of the troop slept, and the pickets which watched over that bivouac in the forest were watching over those whose ears and eyes were as vigilant as their own—kept vigilant by anxiety and sorrow.

But, while the soldiers watched there was one who could not take even a waking rest. The trapper, long inured to toil, and accustomed for years to find his home in the solitudes of nature—his companionship in the lonely wilderness—was up and doing.

"Poor boys," said he softly to himself, as leaning against a gigantic oak, he gazed around him, upon the hardly visible outlines of horses and men: "Poor boys, they haven't seen much of life as yet, if the life I lead *is* life. Let 'em rest; they need it. And I—well, I've my work to do, and, till *it's* done, no sleep shall close these eyes, no turf be my bed."

With one long look at the stars, and one long look at the soldiers, he glided softly away, and not one man knew that his place was vacant.

As stated, the trapper knew that the three dead scouts were all that were likely to be met with until the party arrived in the immediate proximity of the main body of the savages.

He knew also, that the main body was not far distant, and with the coolness natural to him, and taught by a long experience of hardship and danger, he resolved upon a night reconnoissance alone.

There was much risk in this course, but much to be gained by it if it was successful. To surprise the Indians was a great point; but, first to find out the whereabouts of the captain's place of confinement was of the utmost importance.

Glancing at the stars which now became visible as the colder night-air condensed the mists of sunset, he commenced his solitary march. The direction of his route he decided, with unerring instinct, to be that in which he already had made considerable progress; and in that direction he soon disappeared.

For five miles or thereabouts, he slowly and cautiously stepped, often pausing to listen to the least sound. At length something attracted his attention, and he sunk noiselessly upon the ground listening intently. Nothing was visible, but a faint cry of a woman weeping scarcely stirred the air, almost close to him. Such an unusual voice was almost terrifying, from its mystery in that lonely place, but, with the utmost circumspection, he gradually crept nearer to where the sound seemed heard. Presently all was still and he heard it no more.

But, just as he turned to look around, a dusky form confronted him at not ten yards distance! Strange to say, the savage, for it was one, failed to see him. But he seemed on the alert, and the trapper could almost fancy he saw his eyeballs glitter in the darkness.

Evidently the Indian encampment was close at hand. Evidently the solitary Indian was a sentinel over its probably sleeping inmates. At all events if he was a sentinel he was faithful to his trust, for he seemed unsatisfied with the results of his scrutiny, and moved toward the spot where he suspected some hidden enemy, silent as the trapper's movements had been. The latter was as still as a shadow however, and, completely hidden by the brush, was not discovered.

Here arose a question in the trapper's mind. Move back or forth he could not without attracting instant attention. To passively stay where he was would defeat the object of

his journey from his companions. There was nothing left but to kill the savage, kill him without noise if he could, kill him at all risks, and without hesitation.

No rifle-shot must disturb the repose of that deep shade; its echo would not die away before the scene would be alive with howling, leaping forms. The knife, and the knife alone, must do the work. Where the Indian stood was not a couple of yards from the trapper's crouching body.

With a stealthy motion, the hunting-knife that had cut the throat of many a deer was loosened in its sheath, and then, straight up before the Indian, rose a gaunt, giant form, and, while one grisly hand clutched the brown throat in a grasp like iron, the keen blade was buried to the hilt in his bosom. With a stifled groan the victim sunk down, nor did that terrible grip of his antagonist loose its hold until the shivering limbs told that the spirit was departing—that the Indian had traveled his last war-path and struck his last blow.

To the honest old hunter the worst was now to come. It was with a sigh and a shudder that he looked upon the dead—the victim of a dread necessity. What if others like that dead man were to be across his track, and whom he must strike down? But, muttering to himself, “Courage, Job Dean; you didn't use to be afraid of carrion,” he prepared to reconnoiter still further in advance.

It was not long before he discovered enough for his purpose, for he came upon the dusky outlines of a small temporary encampment, and in its midst he could discern the tent where a prisoner evidently was guarded, for the recumbent figures of half a dozen savages were stretched around it, with their weapons hardly fallen from their grasp. That it was the captain he did not doubt, and the small size of the encampment seemed to indicate that there were not many warriors, and that the main body was still further ahead.

That was enough to learn, and Job retraced his way, arriving at the bivouac of his friends before the night was more than half spent. The morning, he thought, would be scarcely light before he would be on the path; meanwhile, the boys might rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD TRAPPER'S SURPRISE.

ALL human calculations are liable to error. The trapper had designed moving before the first appearance of day, and surprising the camp in the dim light of earliest morning. His tactics were simple enough. Half of the soldiers were to make a wide *détour*, and get on the opposite side of the Indian camp to that on which himself, with the rest, were to advance. All this programme was carried out with care and circumspection. The horses, whose saddle-girths had only been loosened during the night, were quickly collected, and the men began to lead them slowly through the woods.

The *détour* ordered was necessarily a wide one. The troops would have to travel ten miles at the least before getting in rear of the Indian encampment, and the utmost caution would be necessary to avoid discovery. Communication between the two bodies must be kept up, if possible, or at least a signal must be agreed upon by which the combined attack might be made without blundering. There was but one way in which this could be effected. The party moving round must first dash upon the Indians on the further side, and their comrades, having moved up in front in the mean time, must, on hearing the sounds of battle, at once advance at full speed to their support. The instructions were that both parties set out at once, the one making the direct attack halt as near the Indians as they could without discovery. If, within an hour of the halt, nothing was heard or seen, they must push on a little further and again halt. It was hoped that, by this means, they could arrive within striking distance about the time that the soldiers making the longer journey would also be ready to deliver their blow.

The trapper was wrong—the soldiers were wrong. Experienced as was Job Dean, he failed to appreciate the difference between regular and savage warfare. Ears accustomed to listen acutely for the least sound in those vast solitudes

of nature, could hardly fail to detect the approach of a foe, even be that approach as stealthy as the gliding of a snake. Job himself seemed to have some doubt, for he paused long and anxiously before giving the advice upon which the plan was formed. But he muttered, "Ef it's bad, what can be better? We've got to go in anyhow, ef that poor lad's life is to be saved."

So the two parties moved apart, and soon lost sight of each other.

The trapper remained with those in front, being anxious to regulate their halts. The advance was slow and careful. No precaution was omitted to render it hidden from the Indians. The first pause was made in half an hour. Then a further space was traversed. Then another pause took place; and in this way the soldiers pushed forward, hearing no sounds nor seeing any indications of the presence of an enemy. It really seemed, indeed, as if none was before them.

Strange! They were now close upon the spot where the trapper had seen the silent tents of the savages, but none were visible! Various were the exclamations of wonder and disgust to which the disappointed soldiers gave vent, but there was little to be gained by the loudest grumbling or the tallest swearing. It was evident that the whole move was fruitless, and that another journey must be commenced before powder and steel were to get to work.

At the instant when the trapper, with a very discontented countenance, gave the word for a new advance, three shots were heard, which was the signal agreed upon by the detached party. The answering reports were quickly returned, and in five minutes more the whole force was reunited.

We shall not follow the party through their long and tedious second advance. They saw no trace of Indians, and night found them once more bivouacking beneath the sheltering pines. Nor had they ridden more than twenty miles, owing to the numberless difficulties in their way.

"What d'ye think, Dean," said a young trooper to him, as the two lay stretched side by side smoking their pipes, "What d'ye think the chances are for the captain?"

"Well, 'tis pretty hard to tell. There's good Injins and bad Injins, and these are bad. And they gets worse every year."

"They ought to improve, one would say. Uncle Sam behaves well to 'em, anyhow."

"That's just where 'tis," rejoined the trapper. "Uncle Sam does behave well—gives 'em more'n they've a right to. But, comrade, the giving ain't much good, for it's to the wrong folks."

"Why, how can that be?"

"Just this. There's promises, and treaties, and councils, and all that. The Injins is to have blankets, and powder, and lead, tools, seed, and such like. But, they *don't* get it. By the time what's sent to 'em reaches, it's melted down to next to nothin' by agents and traders who'd steal their teeth out of their heads if they didn't bite sometimes. All that makes 'em more savage than they naterally are, and then comes slaughter, and robbery, and burnin's."

"But, why ain't it stopped?" asked the trooper

"Stopped! Ay, why ain't it? You must ask up at Washington about why it ain't."

"But do they know about it there?"

"That's just as certain as you and I sits here. Why, ain't thar forts, and posts, and a Bureau? and more than all, ain't thar fights which ought to be inquired into? Young man, it's a hard world, and Governments-don't do the thing that's right, by a long shot."

"You get along with the reds, don't you?"

"Hev done, so far, with most on 'em. I've had to run for my life often enough, though, and more than twice only saved it by a quick squint along my barrel, or a keen bit of steel at the end of a tolerable strong arm. And I've thought whether my life was worth keeping at such a price."

"If it was a toss-up which should go down, an Indian or myself, I should not have much doubt about where the worth came in."

"No, you are young, and think as I did when I was as young as you. But, things seem different as I get old. I felt pretty bad last night when I was forced to let out the blood of them three savages."

"Yes, and you'd do it again," said the other, "if you was forced to it."

"I would. But it's in hot blood, young man; and when

it's over, and there's been time to cool down and think—well, I don't like to talk about it."

With that the trapper turned his back to his companion and composed himself to sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

HOME AGAIN!

THE camp was astir betimes in the morning, and the chase resumed as soon as man and beast were fed.

The cavalcade had not proceeded far, before, with a sudden motion of his hand, the trapper cautioned the soldiers, who were brought to a halt immediately. Throwing himself on the ground, he listened intently for a few minutes, and then exclaimed that the footsteps of two horses could be heard approaching.

"We'd best go on slow and ready," added he. "Close order is the word, and a bright look-out ahead."

The sounds were soon heard approaching nearer and nearer, and at last the two riders emerged from the trees, and the astonished men beheld their captain, in the flesh and safe, while riding by his side was a woman, clad as a squaw, but with a veil close about her face, and a rifle at her saddle-bow.

No thought of an enemy within possible hearing restrained the cheer that rose from the lips of the boys—no false shame kept back the tears which ran down from many a face.

Then came the telling of the story of the captivity and the escape. Many a saber was fiercely grasped, and many a muttered curse was uttered as the captain pictured, in few but vivid words, how death had hovered over him. Revenge was in the heart of every man there—swift and sure revenge. They burned to be led against their enemies, and that at once.

"Boys," said the captain, "we'll talk about that presently. I want first to talk with my old friend, Job Dean. Meanwhile we'll camp here."

The trapper, with the captain and the woman, now

withdrew a little and commenced their consultation. The question was, whether an attempt to punish the Indians should be made, or whether the party should return to the fort at once.

"The boys are eager to go on and fight," said Kessler. "I, too, would like to have a dash at the savages. Mabel Ross, for such is the lady's name, shall decide."

Dean looked at her long and earnestly. "May I see her face?" said he.

"Alas," said she, "you would not know it, but you may see the features gazed on for long years by none but savage eyes."

As she removed her veil the trapper scanned the face closely, but with a sigh thanked her, saying, "Ye're strange to me, madam. I never set eyes on ye before."

"No," replied Mabel Ross, "I knew 'twas impossible."

"And what is your idea about what's proper to be done?"

"Go back to the fort. You are too few, and, besides, I should not like to lead you to fight with those with whom I have lived so many years, and most of whom were kind to me."

"It shall be done," said the captain, and the requisite orders being given, the back track was immediately taken.

And fast time they made. The advance of the soldiers had been cautious; now caution was hardly needful—speed was every thing.

It was evening once more, when the whole party reached their journey's end, and were welcomed with wild cheers, by every man.

That night, the captain, the woman, and the trapper assembled with the other officers and the surgeon, and to them all the stranger told her story, as, reader, I will tell it to you.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY.

IN the twilight shadows sat the party of listeners to the music of a gentle and somewhat hoarse voice which told of a home which a woman remembered well, and friends whose images still rested in her heart.

"I am now, friends," said Mabel Ross, "eighteen years old as near as I can remember. My story shall begin when I was about eight years old. Then we all—that is, my father and mother and two brothers and myself—lived together. Our home was in Virginia, and a pretty home it was. My father had a tobacco-plantation, and we were comfortably situated as far as money and friends went. My brothers, William and Charles, eighteen and sixteen, were at college. For any thing that could be seen to the contrary, Elderton was to be our rallying-place and refuge for life.

"There was one drawback to our happiness, however. In an evil hour my father began to be strongly interested in politics, and to frequent meetings constantly, at which he met with men whose dissipation and loose habits generally were a bad example for any one, but for him the worst possible. Naturally polite and good-natured, he could not refuse to join in scenes which, a short year before, he would have thought foolish, to say the least. The end of it was that the wine he drank, first for companionship only, became necessary, and was fast ruining his health, and causing him to neglect his family and estate.

"All this gave my mother great grief. Young as I was I could understand her and feel for her, and see that her heart was breaking. It seems that misfortunes never do come singly. First there was the failure of a crop. Next there was an epidemic among the field-hands. Then a bank broke in which some of my father's money was deposited. Then—and that was worst of all—came a heavy law-suit which involved large expense and much anxiety—anxiety which my father was often kept at bay with drink.

"I remember the day when the law-suit went against us and ruin seemed inevitable. We were all sitting—my brothers then being at home—in the parlor, when a letter came in which contained the news. My father read it, and silently handed it to my mother. She sighed heavily as she looked over the writing and dropped it on the floor. William then read it as did Charles also. And they all looked at each other in blank dismay.

"My father's first act was to go to a cupboard and take from it a bottle. 'One way to kill care is to drown it,' said he, with a hollow laugh. But, my mother rushed across to him, and falling on her knees begged him, for this once, to abstain, and, with her, look their troubles in the face. 'Just one glass,' said he, 'is all I want.'

"'Husband, by your love for your children, for me, not one glass. Rather fling the tempter aside, and pray that you have strength to conquer trouble and yourself.' I remember the group to this hour. Even now I can see his tall form, with her before him, weeping, while he tried to smile as if indifferent. Twice he lifted the bottle to pour, and twice lowered it again. Then he walked to the window and flung it away with all his strength. We watched as it hurtled through the air, and then was dashed to pieces upon the ground.

"My mother fell upon his neck, saying: 'Thank God! While he tenderly kissed her forehead, and said, 'Amen.'

It had been a fierce struggle with him, but he had gained the victory. Never again did my father touch liquor of any kind.

"This gave us all new hope, and the family council which was called to discuss our position was hopeful and full of mutual loving encouragement. The various ways of meeting our difficulties were discussed, although I do not remember what they were, and was, of course, too young to participate in their conversation. One thing I know was certain. We were, if not ruined, very nearly so. After paying all that must be paid there would be but little left.

"I think the idea of emigrating to the West originated from William; at least he was most likely to have formed it. That's of little consequence, however, the main fact remaining that emigration was resolved upon, and that we were to start as

soon as my father's affairs could be wound up. We knew people who had preceded us, and would hunt them up. What experience my father had, or what were his plans on arrival at his destination, I did not know, and never shall know.

"The next three months it was a busy time with us all. Ten years ago, emigration was common enough, however, and what we had to do was easily ascertained. I know that I was sewing most of the time, and that mother was doing the same. Selling off our house and other property, and buying what we needed for the journey, kept my father busy.

"At last all was ready, and we stood for the last time in front of the porch which had sheltered me from infancy, and which had sheltered my father and my father's father, when they too were children. I was old enough to feel sorry to leave, but, childlike, soon forgot my sorrow in the new scenes through which we had to pass.

"As usual we traveled with teams, and there were nearly a hundred altogether, for other families joined our expedition. We were provided with a few articles of furniture, and a stock of provisions, agricultural implements, seeds, and other necessities for emigrant life, and for a long series of days got along tolerably well, traveling by day and camping out by night.

"The region we struck for, was the northern part of Kansas. To reach this we journeyed almost in a direct line westward through Kentucky, crossed the Missouri river, and the State of Missouri, and after about two months' progress entered the southern part of Kansas. Here we began to be watchful. I hardly knew then that that portion of Kansas through which we had to pass was inhabited by horrible Indians, but, how could I? I did understand that there was constant danger, for all the men now rode with guns in their hands, and a careful watch was set every night.

"I often thought afterward, with horror, of the night when my captivity began. We had gone a long distance during the day, and were all tired. The jolting of the wagons was almost as fatiguing as walking, and as the shadows of evening began to close around us, I fell into a sound sleep.

"Several times I knew that my mother came to look at me; I could not have dreamed of the pale face which seemed to

bend over me as I lay, and which even now I often think I see in the night when silence and darkness are around and over all things. I have a dim recollection of my father pacing to and fro with a rifle on his shoulder, and of the indistinct group of teams and men collected together, with the horses quietly browsing in their midst.

"At length all the little camp was quite still, and I slept heavily.

"Dear heaven! Shall I ever forget the sudden crashing of firearms and the awful yells by which I was roused? It seemed as if the whole air was alive with fire and horrible riot. Still, I did not realize what had happened until I distinguished cries of agony and loud shouts of 'Indians, Indians!'

"I felt no terror; I was past that. Sudden exposure to death does not create fear, but stupefaction, and so it was with me.

"But I knew that it was a battle for life, and that every one who could use a gun was at work. Who can describe the scene. There was only starlight and the flashes of the guns. I crouched down in the wagon and remained motionless, one thought in my agonized heart, the thought of my mother and father and my brothers.

"I soon found how terrible was the calamity which had befallen us. My father came staggering toward me and fell down groaning upon the grass. With a wild shriek my mother next appeared, and clambering into my wagon flung herself upon me as I lay prostrate, and I could feel the warm blood gushing over me. I tried to speak. Before I could utter a word she was motionless and I knew that I was motherless. After that I neither felt nor saw more, but swooned away.

"How long I continued unconscious I do not know. It must have been several hours, for when I awoke, as it were, the sun was high in the heavens.

"To my amazement and horror, not a trace of wagons, horses or friends was visible to my tear-dimmed eyes. All that I could see was a crowd of Indians, all mounted, in the midst of whom I was carried in the arms of one who from his appearance I thought must have authority.

"Too weak to cry out, I feebly begged for mercy, and to

know the fate of those dear to me. The only reply was a grave nod from my captor, who at the same time drew a line with his finger round the crown of my head.

"That was enough. I had read of how the merciless red-men killed where they could, and tore the scalps from their bleeding victims. Now the reality was before me, and I once more relapsed as if dead, not to recover until the Indian village, a long distance away, was reached.

"Arrived there I was delivered to the squaw of the chief whose arm had been around me through that terrible ride. She bade me enter, in hardly intelligible English, and I fell down sick and exhausted upon a heap of skins.

"Food was offered me, but I refused it. And before night I was seized with what I afterward knew was a raging fever.

"I was spared. The Indians took care of me, and after a time I was able to rise and walk. But, how changed! The strong, healthy girl had become a shadow. My own clothing had been taken from me, and the only garment I had was a rude canvas frock, while the squaw appropriated all my little finery.

"After the deadly illness came the no less deadly pining for liberty and home, and grief that never had a moment's respite. For years the shock of those events weighed upon me like a blighting cloud, and I was astonished that my jailers did not end my misery by one blow from their tomahawks, or one bullet from their guns.

"But, I was to live; why, I did not learn until afterward. Two or three years passed away, and I began gradually to resume my strength. The life of the camp was my life, the habits of the camp my habits. There was one unvarying succession of riot and drunkenness, fighting, expeditions from which the warriors returned with spoils, and sometimes prisoners for torture and final death.

"One of these scenes was like all the rest. On a fine morning there came back nearly fifty warriors who had been absent three days, and brought a man with them, gagged and bound and bleeding. He was the last of some emigrant train, and because he had killed three Indians with his own hand was to be subjected to special indignities and cruelty.

"This poor wretch was kept tied to a tree for several hours,

and made to serve as a mark for practice for the boys of the tribe, who shot their tiny arrows into his naked skin. No sound escaped his lips in spite of his great agony.

"At length evening came and he was brought, still bound, into the circle of warriors who, by that time, had eaten their fill and were more than half tipsy.

"The chief, *my* owner, sat looking at the captive white man for a long time with a bitter scowl. The man did not flinch.

"'Dog of a pale-face, we will burn you alive,' said he, at last. 'Why did you shoot my young men?'

"There was no answer.

"'What, has the white man no words? He was brave before, is he a coward now? Our squaws shall spit upon him. He shall be their slave. They shall flog him like a dog.'

"Still no answer.

"'See. The sun goes away yonder. Yonder have gone the spirits of three of my brothers. They were braves. I cover my face when I think of them. Their women are sad. What shall I do to the thief who stole their lives?'

"'Do!' at last shrieked the prisoner. 'Do! Kill me; tear me limb from limb; let me go to those whom you have murdered.'

"'We shall see,' gravely replied the chief. 'You are very brave, but we will make you cry like a crawling hound. See, the beginning?'

"Three of the warriors stepped forward to where the man stood. They deliberately scored him down the breast with their knives, and then went back to their places in the circle.

"'Good,' grunted the chief. 'What says my white brother now?'

"'Nothing but to curse you.'

"Three other young men advanced, and they cut off the ears of the unfortunate captive.

"'What says my brother now?'

"'Still nothing but to curse you all'

"'Then it is still very good.'

"With that a number of the women rushed into the circle. Taunts, insults of all kinds, blows, were rained upon the

captive. No result followed save the same words, 'I curse you all.'

"At a sign the women retired, though with great reluctance.

"The chief rose—

"Spare me, gentlemen, what follows. I looked upon it spell-bound, but I can not tell it you. I only seem to have a confused vision of a form mangled and mutilated, and a huge fire out of which came groans but never a cry for mercy.

"Another scene rises before my eyes. The chief who had captured me designed me for his wife some day. This was well known, but it did not prevent jealous rivalry among the young warriors for marks of preference. Two of these in particular persecuted me with secret words of flattery, and as I grew older this annoyance increased. It was when I was about sixteen that the scene occurred which I will describe.

"One of them, Eagle's Feather, had been hunting with some of his fellows, and on their return the party got drunk. The other of these two, Little Bear, and he, quarreled about me, and the quarrel terminated in so great a disturbance that the chief heard of it, and was greatly enraged. His first impulse seemed to be to fight one or both of the drunken revelers, but suddenly he changed his mind. They should, he said, fight each other on the morrow, and the conqueror should, if willing, fight himself—for me!

"The decision was received with murmurs of approbation. The next day was a fair one, and the whole tribe was early on the alert for so unusual a spectacle.

"They assembled on a level piece of turf, where a great ring was formed of every human creature from every lodge. The two men were placed alone in the middle. Great Thunder, my owner, then made a speech. He said that he wished his young men to be brave. He was not angry with them because they had looked on me. He was not angry with me. But they had tried to be equal with him and he would let them prove whether they were worthy and whether they would follow their ambition even to death.

"Then he gave knives to both, and stepped back and sat gravely upon the ground.

"The signal was given, and from a listless, indifferent attitude they became at once full of nervous, active life. No

panther crouching for its prey ever looked more wary and cat-like than the two men.

"Circling round each other, each watched for a chance to strike, and neither showed a point of attack. But this did not last long. They grew more eager, and, after several desperate passes, closed.

"Instantly the two figures seemed one writhing, undistinguishable mass of body and limb, and flashes of steel glittered like lightning as blows were struck. Then one sunk from the other's arms, and with blood spouting from a dozen wounds, Little Bear lay dying. The conqueror, also bleeding, turned his eyes toward his chief—eyes blazing with ferocity.

"The chief rose. 'It is well, my brother. You are weak and may not fight now again. In another moon you may be strong, and then I shall keep my promise.'

"Vain words! With one bound Eagle's Feather sprung upon the speaker, and with one gigantic effort buried his reeking blade to the hilt in his body. Great Thunder fell dead. Eagle's Feather waved his knife in the air with a yell of triumph and then dropped. Not many minutes and the howl of mingled rage and sorrow that filled all the air made me shudder even more than the spectacle of blood and death before me.

"My life was long in danger after this. The squaws hated me. The new chief hated me, though to me he owed his new rank. And for two more years I was the reviled drudge and slave of them all."

Here Mabel paused.

"Spare me a further relation of my sorrows," said she. "I escaped the fate reserved for me, because, through me, three great warriors had died, and not one of the rest dared to seek me for his own wigwam. How the years passed I know not. I am rescued. Thank God and my brave preservers here."

The listeners departed, all save two.

These sat long and silent. At last the captain (for it was he) spoke in a low voice:

"And so you have no friends—no home?"

"None," replied Mabel, "none in the wide world." And she sighed as desolation and grief borne for a lifetime makes humanity sigh.

"Then let me be your home, your friend. Be to me wife as well as savior. Nay, turn not away; there has sprung up within my heart a mighty love for you. We can not part again."

The woman, with a low cry, nestled against his breast.

CHAPTER XI.

A PLEA FOR A WIFE.

"BACK at the camp. Hurrah!"

Such was the enthusiasm with which the reappearance of Captain Kessler to his companions was greeted at the camp, that for some time the bounds of military discipline seemed entirely broken through. As we have said, the captain was much beloved, not only for the justice which he always exercised toward his men, and the kindness which he invariably manifested, but also for the ready bravery which he possessed, and which had never been known to quail or flinch.

He had been given up for lost by many of the garrison. The best that many expected was that the expeditionary party would be able to recover his mangled remains. But here he was, hale and strong, and not a whit the worse for his danger and suffering!

Of course the brave old trapper, Job Dean, came in for his full share of the honors. A great deal of credit was due to his courage and sagacity.

But the strange lady, so strangely clad, who had ridden gravely in among the little party, was soon known to be the one who had actually snatched the captain away from his foes, as a brand from the burning. The soldiers rent the air with their praises of her, they thronged to kiss her hand next day when she appeared among them; nay, many shed tears of excitement and joy.

But she received their homage sadly. It was strange to her, this scene of camp-life, with its scores of brave soldiers crowding round her so eagerly. How long ago was it that

she had spoken with white men before! Alas! how long! In that moment of supreme joy around her she could but weep. With passionate sobs that she hid from their eyes, she remembered all that had gone before, and the long panorama of her childhood, her captivity and her release passed swiftly before her mind's eye. This hour had been long in coming; it was come at last: what could she do but weep?

But the boys in blue did not fail to see her agitation, and with instinctive delicacy forbore further demonstrations. The captain also recognized that quiet and seclusion, if not from all, at least from all but one or two of her new friends, were desirable.

"Boys," said he, and as his clear voice rung out, every man listened in absolute silence, "Boys, I thank you in this lady's name and in my own. What she has done is what makes her dear to you, and her country grateful. What I feel—"

But his voice refused words to finish the sentence, and, with trembling lips, he gently led her into the officers' house, where he left her alone with good Mrs. Heffernan.

What that good woman said or did need not be guessed at. We may be sure that she received the strange lady into her heart as though she had been a child of her own who was lost and was found again.

Harmer Dorlon had now recovered sufficiently to move about. Next day, said the doctor, he might be able to walk—"with a little help, such as *a staff, or one of the gentlemen's supporting arms*," added the merry Esculapius, with a knowing twinkle of his eye. "D'ye think anybody'll take the trouble to give ye a lift, Dorlon?"

"Shouldn't wonder," replied the invalid. "I'll ask Mrs Heffernan."

"Couldn't be better. Shall I ask her myself for you?"

"Don't trouble yourself, doctor. You are very kind, but somehow—in fact—don't you see—"

"Exactly, I see! Well, take care of yourself, that's all. By the by, here's Miss Boynton coming, so I'll go."

It was a graceful figure that swept across the open grass-plot within the fort to meet her sick friend. Tall, well formed, her frame had all the elasticity of youth, with the glorious rounded fullness of the fully-developed woman. As Dorlon

looked upon her, he thought with a strange thrill that the time *might* come when he should fold all that loveliness in his arms and call it his own. As she came nearer, and he could look into her eyes, she cast them down and a rosy blush dawned upon her fair cheek. Timidly she put her hand into his outstretched palm, and almost tremblingly replied to his greeting.

Strange that the brave girl who had looked without blenching upon the horrors that had crowded into the life of that little family of emigrants, should now seem as timid as a child! Strange that the pitying eyes that had watched her wounded patient through so many hours, and met his mute appeals for help by looks of love, should now be veiled with shyness! Strange that the hand which had so many times pressed tenderly and firmly upon his brow, should shake so much as he took it into his own!

It was the old, old story. She was transformed by the great magician, Love, and in his mighty presence she was afraid.

There was a beaten path outside the fort, which was just the place for a walk for lovers. The fortifications, such as they were, hid those there from the observation of the garrison inside, and, as now, it was often deserted entirely. Leaning upon Margaret's arm, the young man slowly proceeded to this path, and the pair commenced the walk which the doctor had advised.

For a long time neither spoke, though the busy brain of each was answering to the other.

"Margaret," at last said Dorlon in a low voice, "I believe that you saved my life."

"Oh, no, no! Not I!" she murmured. "It was the will of Heaven that you should live."

"True; but you being the instrument heaven employed, it is still the fact that you saved my life."

"May it be spared to you, and be a happy one!"

"It must be different from the past, then, if it is to be. Until lately I have never felt that it was useless; now I feel that I am but of little account to any one. Even you must see that, so far as fulfilling any duty, or having any mission but that of pleasure—"

"Indeed, indeed, Mr. Dorlon, you do yourself injustice. We can all of us do something in this world."

"But that was not what I wanted to talk about. Referring once more to the certainty that I owe my existence to your kindness, I would ask you a question."

"And I will answer it—if I can."

"You can. It is this: What are you going to do with that of which you have been the preserver?"

"Ah, it is not for me to map out your future! You will soon be gone from here, and we may never meet again in this wide world."

"Not so. Margaret, dearest, dearest Margaret. Your life henceforth is part of mine, and on you depends that future and its hopes. I love you, Margaret, and have hoped that you knew I did. Was I wrong? Will you not be to me my dearest possession? May I not be your greatest friend on earth?"

As Dorlon thus spoke, he gazed upon her with the ardor of deep affection, while she looked upon the ground.

"Speak to me one word," he urged; "tell me that you will be my own. Surely you love me?"

"Alas, I fear I do," at length she answered, while a tear stole from her closed eyelids and rolled down her cheek.

"Fear! Why, Margaret! Nay, darling, it is enough that you love me without the fear."

"We must not be more to each other than we are now," faltered she.

"And why, Margaret, why?"

"Do you think that I could leave my poor father now?"

"He shall be my honored guest for life."

"And you? You will soon tire of the farmer's daughter you met with in the wilderness."

"As heaven is my witness, no! It is impossible that you can ever be to me less dear than now."

"I am a stranger, too, to you and yours."

"If you are mine, all mine is yours as well—home, relations, friends and all are yours."

"Oh, do not urge me. Give me time to think."

"Meanwhile you love me? Say it once again."

And she did say it once again. So another pair agreed to

launch into the unknown sea of the future in each other's company, and brave its storms or bask beneath its sunshine together.

There was no use concealing their betrothal from the friends around them, and soon Margaret, with her face upon her father's breast, whispered the news to him. Dorlon told the captain and the captain others, and the whole camp envied the young fellow, and wished him well.

"And now, boys," said the captain, as he produced a bottle of rare old Kentucky, that same night, as a little knot of men were gathered in his tent, "And now, boys, we have seen both sides of a soldier's life, war and love. Let's drink to Margaret. May she marry her man soon, live long, and die happy! If there's any wish better than that I do not know it."

And they all pledged her in their hearts—may she live long and die happy!

I think, however, that Harmer felt more enthusiastic about the first part of the toast, that about marrying soon, than either of the two other parts thereof, for a good reason too—was he not the "her man" referred to?"

CHAPTER XII.

JOB DEAN IN A NEW CHARACTER.

For a few days all was quiet at the camp, and the routine of duty went on just as it had before the events occurred which we have undertaken to narrate. Our old friend Job seemed the only one who could not settle down. He walked about hurriedly for hours, and often muttered to himself like one possessed. Sometimes he would stand gazing absently toward the East, and then a light would come into his eyes as if some form long missed had come before them again.

One evening he had been standing for some time by the side of one of the huts, his mind more than usually abstracted and his whole manner disturbed. Captain Kessler and Dorlon,

now nearly recovered, stood at some little distance watching him curiously.

"It seems to me that Job has something on his mind," said the latter. "Suppose you rouse him up a little and find out what it is?"

Kessler made no reply, but walking across to where the trapper stood and slapping him on the back, said, cheerfully:

"What's the matter friend? I hope there's nothing amiss with you."

The trapper started violently, and turned to gaze upon the speaker. His eyes wore a strange, troubled expression as he did so, and then he turned them away.

"If I can be of any use; if I can pay even a part of my debt of gratitude to you; if you will give me your confidence—"

"You shall have it, captain! I've thought of asking it this many a day, since you came back from your little visit to them red-skins."

"May Dorlon share your confidence with me?"

"He may, and I'm glad to have him do it."

"Come into my tent then."

The three men entered the captain's tent, and each began the proceedings by throwing himself on a pile of furs and by lighting the accustomed pipe. Dean smoked a long while gravely, and without a word; and the others waited patiently until he should begin to speak. At last, with a half-sigh, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and commenced:

"It warn't long ago," said he, "that I killed three men. They was red-skins, but they was men. I've done it afore. My hands has been red with other blood than that of deer and buffalo."

"You did what any brave man would do," said Kessler.

"I know it. I'd do it again. It was my life, and yours and others' against theirs, and they lost the game."

"They were thieves, murderers, wretches, the mention of whom makes my blood boil."

"That's all right too, captain. But, somehow, I can't get them three men out of my head. There was one of 'em in particular. It was the way he fell and lay when he was down that's been haunting me ever since."

"But that's fancy, too, friend Dean."

"Perhaps 'tis. But there's a story of my life that that dead savage has brought back to me, and that I've never told to mortal man."

Both listeners grew more interested and leaned forward eagerly.

"It is the story of why I came out to this wilderness, what made me what I am, nothing but a lonely man—'pears to me nothing but a vagabond upon the face of the earth."

The trapper bent his head upon his hands as if overcome by strong emotion, but speedily recovered himself, giving his burly frame a shake as if he shifted some heavy burden that weighed upon his shoulders.

"Friends," said he, "it don't matter how many years ago it was that Joe Bowers and me was firm, close friends. It don't matter what city we lived in neither; I'll only say it *was* a city. We'd been schoolmates, we'd been classmates at college—you wouldn't have thought I'd been to college?"—this last with a kind of dreary laugh. "He was a fine lad, was Joe! People were very fond of him, too: so they were of me, for the matter of that. We were always together. We shared each other's pleasures, and never had an unkind word or thought between us, until one day, about which I am going to tell.

"We were fond of company, and there was hardly a frolic in which we did not share and were welcome guests. The most frequent of these occasions was at the house of a family named Rivers—that's the name I shall give them. There were several sons and daughters who don't need mentioning at all. There was one daughter whose face comes to me in dreams even now, after all those long years.

"She was a lively girl, friends, ay, she was! Hair like golden threads, and soft as silk; eyes out of which a heaven of love shone gently; a form that a man would give a lifetime to clasp in his arms for one short moment."

The trapper's auditors listened almost awe-struck, as a light they had never seen before beamed from his eyes. It was strange that, as he sat there, looking into some far-off scene which was invisible to them, his whole appearance changed. He was no longer the wild, stern hunter whose life had

roughened him like the trunks of grand primeval trees, but the graceful youth of another era of existence. His words even were no longer the uncultivated phraseology of the prairie, but polished and forcible, sometimes even elegant. He had in truth gone back in life some fifteen years or more, as he sat speaking there.

"We both, Joe and I, loved that girl, but neither of us knew it of the other. 'Twas our first mutual secret, and our last. How deep his love was I can not say. I have no right to think it less deep than mine, but I judge more calmly than I did then. As for me, I was mad for her. Do you know what that means? Do you know what it is to live but in a woman's presence? to ache in brain and heart for her? to carry her features and see them perpetually? to see no form but hers? to hear no voice but hers? God help me! I shudder as I think of the fire that consumed my very soul in those happy and awful days that are gone.

"We two young men were her most constant companions, and by some strange chance were always sure to be in each other's way. I had no suspicion why he was in my way—he had none of me. And thus it went on from month to month until one Christmas eve when we, with many others, were at her father's house.

"It was an old house with a veranda on all sides of it. The parlor opened onto one.

"Well, it was a large party. There was music, dancing, games, and all sorts of fun—none of it fun to me. She was in the hight of her beauty, and as she floated by in an old-fashioned quadrille, her white gauzy dress flying in a cloud behind her, her pretty hair waving over her beautiful white shoulders, and her tiny feet keeping step with the music, she looked—Heavens! I can hardly bear to remember it!

"The evening passed along, with noise and merriment enough. I had been looking for a chance to get her for a partner, but so far without success. She had only laughed, and said, that I saw her so often that I must not be selfish to-night. Light words, yet with hope in them, too, I thought. Soon after the last refusal, Joe got hold of her and I watched them, with envy, it is true, but not anger, for still I had not suspected him. Oh! blind, blind that I was!

"At this moment, there was a pause in the dancing, and old Mr. Bowers told me to take a young girl to get some lemonade, and I had to do it of course. When I came back with her Joe had disappeared, and so had she. That was a likely enough thing to happen, for many of the guests had gone out on the verandas to enjoy the mild winter air."

"You didn't follow them?" said Dorlon.

"Play the spy? Impossible! Alas, would that I had stooped even to that dishonor. No. I waited quietly. After awhile she came back, and how changed! Pale and trembling she was, though an angry cloud had spread over her pretty face. They had quarreled then? That was good, so far. They separated widely in the room, and in a short time Joe went away without her notice.

"She seemed unhappy, and refused the attentions of many of her friends, telling them she would like to rest alone a little. Then she got up slowly and passed out by herself upon the veranda once more.

"I had pictured to myself for weeks the chance that I might have at this very party of telling the truth to her. I felt that I must do it. Here was the chance. I followed her quietly, with my heart beating as if it would burst.

"She stood leaning upon the balcony railing, with her head bent down, and though I could not see her face, I knew that she was weeping. Excitement; something Joe has said to her, I said to myself. Then stepping as softly as I could, I stood behind her, and laying my hand upon her rounded arm, spoke her name, not in my own voice, but with a miserably hoarse tremble. She did not turn nor answer.

"'Lena, I love you, more than I can tell. I have loved you ever since I saw you first, with all my soul. Oh, Lena. Won't you speak to me?'"

"'Leave me, leave me!'" was all she said. I don't know what I answered, but I talked wildly, passionately, my lips hardly able to form the words. At last she raised her head, and looking, not at me, but at the starlit sky, bid me begone and never see her face again, and then, with a faint moan of — 'Joe Bowers,' slid to the ground in a dead faint.

"There was confusion directly, and I rushed from her and from the house.

"But one thought burned into my brain now. Joe Bowers—he then had been a traitor; he had poisoned her ears against me; he was my rival and deadly enemy!

"I went straight to his house, but he was not there. I would wait for him, I said to myself, if I waited for him forever. And I ground my teeth with that sort of rage that don't come often in men's lives, thank God!

"At last I heard him coming. I met him, sprung upon him, and with my hand griping his throat bore him to the ground. 'So it's you,' I hissed, as I held him down, and his eyes glared at me in speechless terror. 'You, you dog.' Just then came footsteps toward us and I partly came to my senses. I got up. He rose. To this day I see him standing, not cowed, now that I had let him go, but quietly putting his clothes straight.

"'Now,' said he, when the footsteps had gone by, 'are you mad, or drunk, or both?'

"'Neither, scoundrel, unless you mean drunk with hatred and rage and, mad enough to take your life.'

"'What mistake can you have made that—'

"'No words, no words,' I whispered; I could not speak louder for my passion. 'I won't hear one. You are a villain, double-dyed. Speak again and I will cram the cursed lie you would tell me down your infernal throat. Only one thing I have to say. You and I must have this thing out at twenty paces, or I'll drill your carcass with a ball whenever I see you next.'

"'I am no coward, Dean,' said he. 'I *will* speak. If you are not a coward hear me.'

"'I'll hear you when we stand face to face before each others' muzzles.'

"'Be it so. I've cause enough, heaven knows, in your language and your violence.'

"'To-morrow is Christmas day,' said I, sternly. 'We'll celebrate it in our own way. Duck-shooting's good, now! There's a boat handy; the river isn't frozen all over; will the sport suit you, dog that you are?'

"'It will,' said he, gravely.

"'Then at daybreak expect me where the boat lies. I shall have my rifle, and you—'

“ ‘ I shall have mine, and God judge which of us two shall be a murderer.’ ”

“ With that he left me, and I went home, but not to bed.”

As these words passed the trapper's lips there was a tremendous cheer heard, which rose up again and again, and which caused his hearers to rush tumultuously into the open air. All the soldiers were out of their quarters, and crowded round something which was shut from view by their figures.

“ What is it? What is it?” shouted Kessler, running to the spot.

The men drew aside in obedience to their captain's words, and he saw a sight that filled him with the wildest astonishment. For there, lying insensible in Mr. Boynton's arms, was a woman whom none of them had seen before—a woman with garments torn to ribbons, with face ghastly with suffering and hunger, with bare feet cut by brambles and bleeding, with blood upon her dress, her whole appearance utterly desolate and exhausted. And, although she lay like one dead, her fingers never unclosed from a string of rag by which a young gazelle was fastened to her hand.

“ Who is she?” “ Who is she?” was echoed from mouth to mouth.

We will inform the reader, though it may take a little time and interrupt Job Dean in the narration of his sad story.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN APPARITION.

It will be remembered that when that fatal occurrence which nearly destroyed the settler's family took place the news was brought by Boynton, carrying his daughter Margaret. He had remained at the fort as well as she, and neither of them ever could be persuaded to visit the scene of so much horror. The soldiers who were the first to do so saw but the traces of a bloody deed and knew too little of the

particulars to detect what might have been to them of considerable interest. They buried the bodies they found, and there was an end to that part of the business. All, no doubt, had perished save the two fugitives who had gained refuge in the fort.

But, all had not perished; one was still alive. For, as the band of savages disappeared in the distance they bore with them Alice Boynton, the wife of John Boynton and the mother of Margaret. Strange and horrible as was the fate to which this woman knew she was bound, her courage never gave way to despair, nor did her fearless eye blanch once beneath the ferocious looks of her captors. She was of the true heroic stock, which proved itself in so many wild scenes of war and terror in the days when George Washington was in the field fighting for his country's liberties.

Alice Boynton was tall and exceedingly fair, of about forty-five, though she did not strike the observer as of nearly that age. She had passed through many scenes of terror and grief, but, though her heart was warm and tender, and her hand generous, her brow knew no wrinkle, her eyes had lost none of their youthful brightness. And now that she had seen her dearest ones on earth destroyed by fire and steel, no terrors crossed her mind, for she believed that this life is but the passage to another, and that when she left it she would but join "the majority" of those whom she had known, but who had gone before.

But, though she knew not fear her tongue should testify her anger and abhorrence.

"Dogs! wretches! what would ye do? Is there not blood enough upon your hands that you must have one victim more? Oh, that I were free that I might tear your throats."

But, she was not free, but tied fast behind an Indian, whose horse chafed unavailingly under his double burden. Struggle she did with all her strength, and once actually brought both Indian and herself to the ground, greatly to his rage and greatly to the delight of his amused companions. She was instantly reseated and the party continued their headlong speed as swiftly as before.

The reader will bear in mind that this was before the attack upon the fort when Captain Kessler was made a prisoner.

The ride before her was long and wearisome, but during the whole time she never ceased her passionate revilings against the men who had her so securely within their grasp. They never answered her. When words rained forth from her pale lips that stirred even their stern impassive natures, they made no reply. All the opprobrious epithets that she could heap upon them did no more than to evoke a gleam of fire from one or two of them. Their time for revenge would come, they knew; what mattered a few idle words when her life and more than her life was in their power? They may have thought, too, that this woman's wrongs, the dreadful fate that had befallen her people, were excuse enough for all that she could say.

But, they would have killed her just as remorselessly as they had slaughtered her friends if she had not been a prize worth capture. As it was, more than one rifle had been pointed at her heart during that dreadful massacre, only to be struck upward by the chief, who, being less drunk with carnage than the rest, had enough coolness to think of spoils as well as of scalps.

Civilize these men! Yes, when the panther forgets his prey, when the rattlesnake forgets his spring, when the vulture passes by a corpse unheeded, then they may be civilized!

At length the journey was ended and she was lifted down from the weary horse to the ground. It was the Indian encampment, and one of considerable extent, though not the same as that to which Kessler was afterward carried. Groups of squaws and children were scattered here and there among the lodges, but no sooner had the first of the warriors become visible in the distance than they all collected around them with yells and frantic gestures. One reason for their rejoicing was that none were missing from the band, while many bore the spoils of their expedition displayed ostentatiously.

But the greater source of triumph and delight was that a prisoner was brought in—a squaw of the pale-faces. Whatever her fate, there were ingenious tortures which these dark-skinned rivals could put her to and none be detected. The jibe, the taunt, the virulent, cutting insult, the utter cruelty in

word and look, and, as much as they dared, in deeds, would be used; and brave, indeed, must she be who would not writhe under the infliction.

But, for the present, she was comparatively safe. The chief took her manacled hand and led her aside to his own tent, and calling to two squaws, who came forth at his command, delivered her to them for safe-keeping. Alice Boynton sat down quietly upon the ground when her two custodians introduced her into the semi-darkness from which they had emerged.

"Why am I tied thus?" she said, with a voice in which the forced calmness but little concealed the storm of rage and grief that wrung her heart and drove her nearly mad.

"My sister will go away, if we do not hold her fast," said one of the women.

"You are captured by a great chief, and we will keep you for him," said the other.

There was no use in resisting. She was, indeed, a prisoner, and without that only consolation which a prisoner can have, the hope of freedom. What disposition would be made of her she dared not guess. If she had had the tiniest blade that ever sparkled in a lady's hand, her fair neck would soon have been gashed by her own hands, and when the chief should claim his victim, a lifeless body would be his only spoils.

But she had no weapon, and could only wait in agonized expectation. It seemed, however, that there were other and more important matters which engrossed the attention of the tribe.

Hardly had the party of Indians returned to their encampment, when there suddenly appeared in their midst a runner from another section of the tribe at a distance. The woman's captors were a small detached band, whose main body was assembled further on in the direction of their march. That there was some important communication for this main body was evident, for there ensued a great deal of hurried talking among the warriors, who finally commenced the proceedings of a regular council.

Most of our readers are acquainted with the manner in which these children of the wilderness conduct their delibera-

tions, and we will only say that the warriors having gravely seated themselves and passed the pipe from mouth to mouth, began to discuss the question before them. An old man first took the floor, or rather the grass.

"Look at me," said this aged warrior. "I am old, and my hand is weak. Once I was strong in battle and the hunting-grounds. Are not there scalps that I have taken? Was not my rifle like the fire that the Great Spirit launches from the clouds? Do not my young men know my name? Did they ever hear that my moccasins were turned from the battle? But, that is over. The youngest of my brothers could strike me down, and these eyes that winked not at the sun are dim and bright no more."

A grunt of mingled assent and respect ran round the group, as the old man spoke.

"But," he continued, "if my arm is feeble my heart is strong. If I can not be with you when you meet your foes, my voice will not be silent, and I will bid you be brave, and spare not. What! Who are these pale-faces that we have seen? Shall we not strike them every one to death? What says Ta-his-ka? He is a great warrior. Let him speak."

Ta-his-ka (White Buffalo) was the chief who had led the party assembled around him. He rose, and dropping the buffalo-robe which had been hanging from his shoulders, commenced his reply:

"Ta-his-ka will speak," said he, "for his father's words are very good. It is but one word—here is Ta-his-ka's knife, and it is red. He is a chief, but there is a greater who has sent his words to me. Wa-me-day-wah-kee (War Eagle) has said, let there be war, and I am ready. I have done."

The whole council were of the same opinion with the two who had spoken, and almost immediately afterward they broke up, and collecting their horses, swept away toward the larger rendezvous of War Eagle. The purport of their journey, and the point at which they were to strike their intended blow, will be easily guessed.

The camp of Ta-his-ka and his warriors was soon almost deserted. None remained in it but a few old men, the women and the children. One other, however, still languished and raged by turns in Ta-his-ka's tent. Alice Boynton sat

there, still bound, still watched by the two squaws stationed there by the chief, their master. Evil looks were those they cast upon her. They were mere slaves, mere drudges, often beaten, oftener starved by their cruel owner, and each would have been grateful for a smile from him with whom smiles were rare indeed. They had, both these women, outlived all the graces which attend the youth of sometimes even Indian girls. They had borne him children who now overtopped them in stature, and long had their day of young maternity departed. They were growing old, and felt that they were growing old. And they hated each other with a hatred blind and fierce. But, much as this hate burned against each other, their passionate detestation of the pale woman who crouched before them and looked defiance, surpassed all other feelings. Kill her they dared not. Deal her cruel blows, or scorch her flesh with knives they dared not. But, they could abuse her with their tongues, and did. For an Indian woman, look you, has her jealousies as strong as the more civilized.

"So," said one, "my sister would dwell in the tent of White Buffalo; does she think she will be good in his eyes? Shall she not be his servant to obey him?"

"Wretches," muttered Alice, with a look of the utmost scorn.

"See," said the other squaw. "We have been wives to him; have hunted, fished, and worked for him, have shared his wigwam for long years. We have borne him young men that will be warriors. Because of these things we will—"

What dreadful purpose was to be uttered we can not tell, for a new idea seemed to dawn upon the mind of Alice, an idea which contained *hope*. The women were "wretches," as she called them—a couple of very dirty and repulsive specimens of humanity. But, they possessed one attribute of human nature in as high a degree as any denizen of the world of intellect or fashion. They could be jealous! Might not this be turned to her advantage? She would try.

"You both hate me. You would kill me if you dared. You think that your brutal master looks upon me with favor. You have said that you are old. Is it not all true? If you are afraid that he will not look upon you with pleasure any more because of me, why, *let me go*. Unbind my hands; give me

a horse—nay, let me crawl upon my knees from this vile place.”

“He would kill us if we did.”

“Are you such fools that he can not be deceived?”

This proposition, uttered as it was with but faint hopes, with but little lifting of the black despair that rested on her, struck both the women with surprise. They looked at her curiously for some time, and conversed apart in the Indian tongue. What they said she could not possibly discover, but it was evident that their earnest debate meant something of consequence to her. We, who are privileged listeners, however, may inform the reader that while she spoke of escape with life, they began to entertain the thought that she might be permitted to escape all her sorrows by death alone. It would be a dangerous step, but the danger was one which might be guarded against by proper means. And the means were adopted, as will be seen.

Turning to her, one of the squaws, who, from her great activity and grace when young had been named Fah-to-ka-no, or Antelope—activity and grace all gone forever now—allowed a sinister smile to cross her sensual face, and answered the request of Alice:

“The pale-face woman is very wise. She knows that a great chief will keep her safe, and some day, when he is tired of her, beat her until she dies, or strike her with one blow dead upon the ground. She knows that all the tribe will spit upon her. Why should she stay if we will let her go?”

“I will bless you all my life—my wretched life, alas, for what have I not lost?”

“Where will our sister go when she is free?”

“Anywhere. Die in the woods of famine, as I hope.”

“Our sister need not. We will show her the path, and she can seek her people.”

“Who of them are left? Do you not know that the ground is reddened with their blood, and that I only live to mourn them?”

“We do not know. But Tah his-ka’s knife is very sharp.”

“Oh, set me free! I shall go mad if I do not escape.”

“When the moon is high you shall go. Now eat, that you may be strong.”

"Untie my hands."

"Not so. Ours will help you instead."

But, though the choicest morsels of dried flesh were placed to her lips, she could not eat. A draught of water was all that her parched throat could swallow.

Hour after hour passed by. But little more was said. Sometimes the face of some Indian boy or girl would peer curiously into the tent, or some wandering squaw look vacantly in passing at the white woman crouching before her strange guard, but otherwise there was no change in the monotony of that lonely vigil.

Night came at last, and then up sprung the moon in all her glory. Over tree-tops and along grassy glades the silvery beams were resting; the time was come when the captive should be a captive no longer. Silently the squaws rose, and with fingers on their lips, motioned her to rise also. There was no eye to watch them, but they could pass to and fro, they knew, with impunity, and all their task was that she should do the same. Disguise to her was to some extent essential, but a robe over her own clothes would answer, and this they placed upon her head so that her form was completely enveloped in its folds. They did not, would not, release her hands, though she again begged that small amount of liberty, but told her that when they left her to pursue her journey alone, she should be fettered in no way whatever.

The three then set out upon a journey, the end of which was unknown to one of them, at least. The way was long and tortuous. Once beyond the limits of the camp, they wound in and about the trees and brushwood, in a manner that to Alice was incomprehensible. But she had no fear.

At length, after a journey of over an hour, and if time was to define its distance, of over three miles, a small stream was reached, of not over twenty yards in width, but whose current was apparently strong and rapid. There was a pause here, and the squaws gazed long and searchingly upon the rushing water. At first sight Alice thought that crossing this stream was impossible, but after a while they seemed to discern a shallower place, which did not prevent passing to the other side. So, wading carefully, they all passed down the bank, and soon reached the opposite shore. The next travel was

along the further or left bank, which they traversed for at least a mile, upward; they then halted.

During all this time but very little had been said by either. But when desired to sit down upon a low, shelving rock which overhung the water, Alice demanded why she might not now proceed alone as they had promised.

The women turned their lowering eyes toward her, and then with a clutch like a vice gripped her fast. The poor captive knew that now there was for her a fight for life. One instant, so swift did the thought pass over her that it was but one, and she was almost ready to die without a word or even a moan or struggle. But, the thought was as quickly gone, and she nerved herself for what was to follow.

They had sprung on her with all the blind fury of the wild-cat. She braced herself with the resolute coolness of a veteran fighter. So when they swayed with her to-and-fro, and sought to bear her to the ground, she clung as tight as they, and if they fell, it must be all together. How long this awful strife continued she never knew, but it could not have been many seconds before, with a spasm of mortal expectation, the glittering knife of one was flashed before her eyes. "Oh, if I were unbound. Oh, God help me!" she gasped.

And as if the prayer was answered, the bonds that had held her so long broke, and she could use her hands! Quick as lightning she caught the uplifted arm of the other, and by one of those wonderful exertions of strength that is sometimes induced by despair, bent it down and inward, straight at the heart of the Indian woman. It was Fah-to-ka-no, the Antelope, who would have killed her white foe, and it was instead the Antelope who lay upon the turf, the red blood welling from her dusky breast, while her eyes glared up in extinguishable hate, and then grew blind forever.

The other woman had, on the instant of the other's fall, sprung back. Her own blade shone brightly in her grasp and her frame quivered as the wild beast quivers before his fatal spring. But with a rapid snatch of the dead woman's weapon, Alice stood prepared.

Thus, in the lonely recess of the woods, by a small stream that no white man's oar had ever rippled, two women gazed upon each other with wrath and ghastly purpose.

They met. Swiftly the deadly blades were flashing between them, and blood soon flowed from each. But, the white woman prevailed. Her antagonist, forgetting in her rage the art of shielding her own breast, soon gave the fatal opportunity, and with a strong stab, dealt with all the force of which Alice was capable, the Indian was given the death-blow. The squaw staggered and fell, but not alone. With a dying grasp she clung to Alice and dragged her down. Upon the trampled clay, locked in a dread embrace, they rolled, with a plunge, into the dark, swift water. The red woman relaxed her hold and sunk at once. But Alice, with the life's stream tingeing the waves, and the sky with its million of stars, and the dark woods around reeling before her fading sight, was carried away helpless and unresisting upon the rolling flood.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAPPER'S TALE RESUMED.

"All the rest of that night, on which I had been cast off by Lena and had challenged him who was once my friend to mortal combat, I spent in a sort of blind, dreamy stupor. Not until the morning did I become fully collected, and even then, though my rage had not abated in the least, I shivered as I looked out upon the sky, and began, half vacantly, to get my rifle ready, and make what final dispositions were necessary for the enterprise upon which I was about to set.

"First, how to account for my absence. That was easy. A hurried note to say that I was going shooting with Joe Bowers was all that was necessary. I wrote such a note and left it on my dressing-table. If I never came back I thought—no matter now about that, for one of us must die; if it were he, then flight; if it were me, then—

"Then what? Alas, my friend, few of us ask ourselves that question too soon in life! Nor, having asked it, did I stop to think.

"The hour was come. I stole forth out of the house, a

possible murderer, and I had no fear, no compunction, no pity : —to kill, kill, or *be* killed was all I thought of now ! It did not take long to reach the place of meeting, which was not two miles away. I was before the time, but Joe was there already. He looked at me hard. Wonder was the chief emotion that he felt, wonder and sorrow, but no fear. We spoke no word. Once he made as though he would address me but did not. I pointed briefly to the boat at our feet. He entered it, his rifle in his hand. I followed him, my rifle in my hand. I took an oar and signed to him to take the other, which he did. And soon we were, as if by mutual understanding, pulling up-stream to where a little island lay a mile further in the middle of the river. We soon reached it. We got ashore. I tied the boat to an overhanging branch, and then we walked in silence to the middle of the island, where there was, as we both well knew, a space free of trees or brush. We were, at last, coming to the end.

“ One of us must speak now, unless we fought without any rule or precedent, and I said the first words that we exchanged that morning.

“ We will stand back to back. When I say ready we will each walk twenty paces, then turn and fire.’

“ ‘ If that fails—’

“ ‘ It will not fail !’

“ ‘ Enough !’

“ We did stand back to back ; I did shout ready, and we then walked twenty paces each, and turned. I fired instantly. My God, he did not, but stood for one moment, and then dropped heavily on the ground.

“ If the sky above me had opened and a thunderbolt fallen upon my head I could not have been more paralyzed with horror than I was now. A thousand years of agony and remorse seemed crowded into my brain, and pierced it like an arrow in one short second.

“ What had I done ?

“ I ran to him. He lay still, looking wistfully in my face as I knelt beside him, trying to stanch the jets of blood which shot from his side with every pulse of his heart. No use, no use ! That sort of bleeding is never stopped. What can I do, oh merciful God, what can I do ?

"Joe smiled faintly. 'Nothing, Job. I'm going fast. I don't know what it's all about, but I forgive you. Leave me; say it was an accident, they'll believe you. Go and be happy with her.'

"'With her. Me happy *with her*! You don't know what it's about! She drove me from her and told me that I insulted her and that she loved you.'

"'Ay. A mistake, Job. She told me *I* insulted her and that she loved *you*.'

"What was this I was listening to? I told him then how it happened. As I spoke his face grew more and more ashy gray, and he was nearly spent when I got to my last word. Then he very languidly smiled once more, and whispered, 'Good-by, Job. She thought it was me come back. I had told her I loved her; she refused my love; you had all of hers. And when you touched her arm—'

"While he was speaking he fell back dead, and I fell senseless at his side.

"How long I lay there I don't know. When I came to myself the first sight was his corpse, with the eyes staring upward and the deep-red blood soaking over the ground. What should I do?

"Life, henceforth, was nothing to me.

"Why not take his gun and blow out my miserable brains? I was a murderer; why not rush to judgment before Him who judges all men?

"Say it was an accident! Not while I had a tongue left to curse myself with!

"Leave him there? Not that either!

"I was simply, utterly mad; incapably, horribly mad. At length even the cunning of madmen mingled with my despair. I would fly and tear other men. I would have revenge on all the world. She—

"And she had loved me too! She had told him so and would have told me so if I had asked her or if she had known whose disguised voice was raving to her on that veranda in the night.

"Never again, never again! The end was come, and I had looked my last upon her!

"And now I asked myself the question murderers always

ask of their guilty, trembling souls: What shall I do with the body? Ay, what indeed? I could not dig a grave for it, but the water was deep, and the means of concealment flashed across me like a flash of light.

"He would lie quiet enough down there, I thought, to myself.

"So I got heavy stones and filled his pockets with them. I tied his gun to his breast. I got other stones and fastened them within his coat. And then I dragged him to the side of the island where the water was deepest and let him slide gently down. And he disappeared from my sight, never to rise until the last trumpet shall sound and we shall all be called together before the Saviour.

"I was very systematic now. Walking as if stunned, I yet went about my work with a defined plan. First those blood-stains. I lit a fire of brush and burned the ground where the stains were. I burned his hat and threw the ashes in the water. Then I got into the boat and rowed across to the opposite shore from that where we started. Here I landed, upset the boat, and shoved her off to float down-stream, upside down. They'll think us both drowned, I said to myself, with a sort of ghastly approbation of my smartness. Then I turned to go. I gave one last look at the old familiar scenes around me, and it was the last. An hour later and I was ten miles away, having met no one, and being for the present safe.

"Safe not only for the moment, but till now. I wandered away, out West, and began a lonely winter's life. No mortal man but you two has heard my story, and none know that Job Deau, the trapper, who has lived with Indians and traded with them, who has been guide to many an emigrant-train and shared in many a skirmish where men have fallen like leaves in the autumn, whose hands have shed blood over and over again, is the murderer of his best friend, an outcast, who carries a hell with him always.

"And when I saw one of those red-skins fall the other day, just as Joe Bowers fell, and lie with his hand clapped to his side as Joe Bowers had his when he lay dying, and look at me with the strange wistfulness that comes into the faces of even a savage at times, and which you may see in your dog

if he thinks you are sorry or in grief and would comfort you, or if you have beaten him and he would forgive you—then, all the scene came back to me, and I felt that, if I did not tell the story to some one I should die. Yes, I felt as if I should die of my awful loneliness of heart and soul.”

CHAPTER XV.

OF COURSE.

WE left Alice Boynton upon that awful night, when, with gashed body and exhausted strength, she was swept away upon the remorseless waves. There was no human likelihood that she could be spared. But it was otherwise ordered by the decree of Providence. In the first place her wounds were not so deep as to be of themselves fatal, and the cold contact of the water almost immediately stopped their bleeding. And by one of the strange chances—if indeed they *are* chances—which affect us in this life, she had not floated far before a fallen branch that rested trailing from the bank stopped her onward progress. Instinctively, though hardly alive, she grasped it, and it bore her up. That saved her life. The touch of the wood alone recalled her to herself, and she realized that, if she would avoid a miserable death there was some hope.

So, tightening her hold, slowly and by degrees she drew herself upon the bank. Here she sunk down exhausted, and the deadly faintness that had nearly been her ending stole over her senses and she became utterly insensible.

Oh lonely, pitiable object lying there! A woman lost; a matron who had been the glory and delight of an American home, who had passed through horror unutterable; who had seen her loved ones stricken down, who had passed through bloody danger, through captivity, lying thus far from human aid, lying in the solemn wilderness, alone and lost! Was not the cup of misery for her yet full? Was not her weary travail over?

Not yet, not yet !

The strong heart within her yet beat, and when the sun rose high and warmed her limbs, its pulses once more mantled in her face, and from a faint she passed into a dreamless sleep. That sleep saved her and gave her courage. When at length her eyes unclosed she shuddered for a moment, but sat up and calmly looked around her. She was not afraid, had never yet been. The massacre, the capture, the escape from murder and drowning rose up in one long vision to her memory, but she was not afraid. Her loneliness, her desperate condition, her wounds that ached and smarted, her ignorance of where she was, her hunger, with no food to assuage its craving, all were felt and remembered, but she was not afraid. "A chance for life is all I have," she muttered to herself, and then prepared to move away.

But where?

There is something wonderful in human instincts, one of which is that which guides lost travelers, though they know it not. "Down the stream and follow it," was what something told her was best. Explorers ascend rivers to their sources, but wanderers feel that, as the stream flows, so lies the path for home.

Alice set herself seriously to think. She must try to find some food. There were birds, but she had no gun nor even bow and arrow. There were animals that crept about or scampered away from a human step, but hers was not the hunter's strength or skill. Berries of various kinds she might find, and roots. Perhaps a fish might be netted as she had netted them in years gone by with twigs and boughs interlaced, as she knew how.

So she began her journey bravely. Before long she came to where a little wood, skirting the river at about a hundred yards' distance, extended for a mile or more. On its edge were many bushes, which were full of berries. These she gathered eagerly. It was a sorry meal, but she was thankful, and, as she laved her mouth with cool water from her hand she felt immeasurably refreshed. Just as she rose from the grass on which, for a few minutes, she had rested, she saw peeping from behind a far-off tree a young gazelle. It was a delicate and beautiful creature, and not much larger than a

full-grown hare. Its pretty head was nearly white, and its soft, gentle eyes were filled with a mingled curiosity and fear. The sight was wonderfully pleasant to her; it seemed to bring her nearer homes where petted animals were caressed by children's hands. Oh, if she could catch it and take it with her! No easy task, however. The creature was as shy as a crow, and stood poised for flight at the first sign of danger. She remembered now that, in her younger days, some book had said that the gazelle would fearlessly approach a scarlet rag, held in a person's hand. In a moment a strip of her already torn petticoat was held out to it, and sure enough, hesitatingly at first and then more boldly, the gazelle came close to her and she had it safe! To tie it by the neck to her wrist was easy, and the little bleating thing was hers. An odd possession, some would say; but, reader, it had loving eyes that appealed to all her heart, and in that wild solitude she felt no longer alone.

All that day, resting often, but never long, she toiled upon her journey—mile after mile, still by the rolling water, winding with its windings, but making progress. Then came the night, the solemn night. The woman's limbs were tired as she composed herself for sleep within the shelter of a thicket, and, with the gazelle crouching close to her for warmth, tried to sleep.

There is fatigue too great for sleep—fatigue, that is, where the body is worn out but the mind will not be still. Alice, curled up in her hiding-place, was a picture of complete exhaustion, but her eyes, growing hollow and anxious, seemed to peer into the darkness with an unnatural light. That darkness seemed to her filled with live reminiscences of the past few days. It was a dream of which each act was real; it was reality that seemed like a hideous dream. The view of an instant when she was suddenly snatched from her husband's side, and, looking for one brief moment back at the blinding rifle-blaze and shot bodies falling all around, and then the thick darkness, as a heavy robe was flung over her head—what had been the sequel? She thought of it with intensified agony. How many were the victims? Was she the only living left? Was her husband—he whose brave heart had beat against her own so many years; her brave boys, whose curly locks

and honest eyes were like their father's ; her bonny girl, who, wise beyond her years, was friend as well as daughter—were they *all* gone forever ? Dead ? Or, were they living and grieving for her ?

Alas ! there was but little hope of them, for the work from which White Buffalo had borne her had been too quick and deadly, as she well knew.

For the first time she wept, tears of miserable heart-breaking. The little creature which she had fondled gave out a plaintive cry of pain, as, with a passionate gesture of suffering, she pressed it hard against her breast ; it licked her face, as if in entreaty for its young life.

" Ah, poor little one," she sobbed, and softly caressed it, " do not think me cruel ; I am sorely tried."

As many a traveler in wild deserts, overcome at last by blind despair, has lifted up the soul in mute entreaty to that Power which gives and may take back its gifts, so, presently, she more calmly whispered in her solitude the prayers that, from her infancy till now, had been her surest consolation. And as if the supplication found an answer, " nature's soft nurse," sleep, at length laid gentle fingers on her eyelids, and kindly pressed them down.

She lay for hours, until, indeed, the morning breeze and golden sunshine awoke her, cheered and rested.

Then on the march again. But, before she began the travel for the day, with all a woman's instincts she sought a safe place and laved herself in the cool current, and performed a toilet simple enough, but which made her feel more like herself. When she resumed her garments and had smoothed her wet hair, she fed her dumb companion with tender leaves, and let it drink. It was strange, but the animal already had grown tame, and feared her not. " Oh !" thought she, bending down to kiss the delicately-shaped head, " if I ever do escape with life from this my pilgrimage, you will be to me a treasure indeed !"

All through that day, all through the next, she traveled on, and saw no sign of human being. Her condition became very miserable. Her shoes, strongly-built though they had been, were worn to pieces ; her clothes, rent in a hundred places by briers and underwood, could scarcely hold together

Then she began to get nervous. There is a great difference between being nervous and being afraid. The first is a purely physical disability which ensues upon too much excitement, too much fatigue, or bad health. The second is the power which is wielded by the moral nature of a man. Alice grew nervous, but was not afraid. At dusk, strange forms of trees and bushes would seem to her like ghostly giants or crouching, deadly enemies; and she would spring up and fly till her reason bade her pause. Her sleep was troubled, too, for though she was hardy enough to slumber beneath some shady tree, and had on many a night, yet the day and night were mingled strangely in her brain, and half a dozen times she would wake with a start, and almost shriek as she found herself in the awful solitary silence of the "forest primeval."

So, you see, this brave woman was giving out by degrees. There are limits to human endurance, and she had very nearly reached the full limits of her strength.

Now, for the first time, she began to wonder how it all would end.

She had read of lonely men who, lost in unfathomable woods, or in the vast sandy ocean of some great desert, had wandered from day to day and despaired at last, laying them down to die. She pictured herself as one such wanderer, and thought of how, some day, a woodman or a hunter would find a heap of bones and a few rags under some forest tree. If it came to that, who would recognize those relics? Even the ring she wore would be drawn from its skeleton finger, and some fair girl who should gain it as a love-gift would never know its history.

Well, the end must come before long. An afternoon came when, with tottering limbs she reached a little plateau from whence she could see some distance of the river's course. The view was silent, deserted. Not a sound of man or beast stirred the heaviness of the unmoving air. There was something hopeless, deathlike, in the awful solitude in which she found herself. "It is time to give up," she said, and sitting down upon the ground, her pet still at her knees, one heavy sob broke from her, and, covering her face with her tattered shawl, she hoped no more!

But, it was not here that the life which had held out so

bravely was to end. A soldier came along, fishing in the little stream, which, a hundred yards from where she lay, emptied into the Kansas river, and near also to the fort of which we have seen so much. So that, unconsciously, Alice had taken the very course which led her to her friends.

The soldier found her, and there was great pity in his heart as he looked upon her crouching form. How he spoke to her, and she shrieked out before she fell at his feet, need only be hinted at.

There is a joy so deep that it is almost agony, and such was that of those who had mourned her dead. No words of mine can paint it. None but those who have been near death know what the reawakening to life is like.

Let us leave her and them while they are clinging to each other, well-nigh going mad with ecstasy. Presently they will be calm enough for our farewell to them.

"But," says the reader, catching us by a button as we are about to vanish, "you aren't going to leave us in the dark as to the future of this good company assembled in Uncle Samuel's fort?"

The future, we reply, is known as well to reader as to us. *Of course* Captain Kessler marries Mabel Ross; and *of course* Harmer Dorlon marries Margaret Boynton. There *may be*, I shan't say, army officers who have lately met the elegant and now accomplished, no less than brave-hearted and high-souled, Mrs. Captain Kessler, and thought the captain a very lucky fellow. *Probably*, also, Mrs. Dorlon is the loved and honored favorite of her husband's people. That old Mr. Boynton lives near her also you may be sure, from one well-authenticated fact—that, as Margaret grows in years and happiness, and voices multiply around her, a stately old lady will sometimes gather the little ones about her knee, and tell them the old, sad story of how "Gazelle," the beautiful creature which they love and pet so much, was brought by herself from a wild region, of which she can not think without a shudder, and from which she never expected to return alive.

But, how about Job? Ah, "thereby hangs a tale," which epilogues this narrative like a kind of benediction before dismissal, and we give it.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOB DEAN BEFORE THE DROP-CURTAIN.

FOR all the years that Job Dean had been a denizen of the wilderness, often shunning the white man, despairing often, he never had heard one word of the fate of Lena Rivers, nor whether the fatal mystery in which she had been involved, had been unfolded. To him she was as one dead, as was he to her. Often in the silent hours of night he had wondered where she was, whether she was happy, or whether the earth had gathered her to its bosom. But there was no one to ask even had he dared. The secret of his life must be guarded. Never must human creature learn it, and she least of all.

As we have seen, the burden upon his mind had become impossible to be borne, and he had at last opened his heart for sympathy. And he found it. The men who listened to the narration of that awful duel, and no less awful burial that followed it, were just, as well as brave men. They could blame the unreasoning jealousy, they could condemn the headlong rush to be avenged. But, the tragedy was not a murder. It was a duel fairly fought. Joe Bowers had his chance for life as well as his antagonist. True, the subsequent concealment of the body was wrong, and its discovery would have convicted any man on earth of foul and deliberate murder. But, none of our friends knew whether it had been found, and the question was therefore not worth discussion.

The relation of the story, however all this may be, had a marked effect upon the trapper. His heart seemed lightened and his eyes were brighter as he gazed upon the distance. He said :

"Friends, I feel better for having told you this, and it has put me on a new trail of thought. What if I was to go back to my old life, or as near to it as one so much changed can go?"

"Tell us your reasons first, Job, and then we will give you our opinion."

"Well, then, in the first place, I've always thought that if ever the truth came out, those who learned it would look upon me with horror."

"You see we did not do so," said Kessler.

"And I thank you both with all my soul. Now, if you do not detest me, perhaps others, too, may have some pity. When I come across those who knew me once, think you that they can forgive?"

"Job Dean," said Kessler, "you put a question that it's very difficult to answer. But, first, you love the girl still after all these years?"

"As I love my life. If she is alive, she is still to me an angel on earth. If she is in heaven, there is no angel there whom I would worship like her memory. Love her, friends! Ah, you do not know how I *did* love her!"

"Next," the captain went on, "do *you* think she would forgive you?"

"God grant it. But, I tremble at the thought of her look, if I, stained with my friend's blood, were standing in her presence. But, I'll leave you, friends, for the present. I've got to work the idea out. I've got first to think whether I *can* face the old associates of my youth. I've got to think how much to tell them. It's an awful question, and must be gone into alone." Saying these words, Dean slowly withdrew, and we will leave him to himself.

We must now ask the reader to go back with us many years, and meet us in that far-off village where, one morning, two men stood face to face, bent on dealing death upon each other. The sun had long risen, and seldom upon so fair a day. Last night's festivities have dimmed none of the bright eyes that were so merry, and Lena's were the brightest of all. She was no sluggard. The rustle of her morning dress as she flew from room to room made pleasant music early as the song-birds woke. Her favorite exercise in the morning was walking, and on this day she did not omit her custom. So with a favorite companion she took her way along the banks of the little river, a path she loved well. As she strolled on, the two girls rattled on about the party and their partners, and mutual confidences often dyed their cheeks with rosy blushes.

"Lena," said the one we will call Aggie," when shall you ask me to be a bride'smaid?"

"Not until I am going to be a bride," replied her friend.

"Then I had better get ready, for, if there isn't soon to be a match between a certain Job Dean and a young lady I know of, I'm a false prophet, that's all."

"It's never safe to prophesy, Aggie."

"But he loves you."

"Hush! hush! If he does—but don't foretell what may never come to pass. What is that in the water?"

"How strange! A boat upset! Whose can it be?" replied Aggie. Saying these words she ran down toward the bank, and looked earnestly at the little craft. "Lena, Lena, come here. Oh, how frightened I am! It's Joe Bower's boat, I am certain." And the poor girl turned pale as death. With a sudden fear Lena joined her.

"I don't think it's Joe's," she exclaimed. "But let us try to reach it."

The stream was narrow, and at that point it was not difficult to seize the little craft, and guide it carefully to the shore. The boat reached, they easily righted it. There was nothing in it, not a sign even of its having been used, that they could at first discover. But, after a while they found a powder-flask firmly wedged under one of the seats. Still, that was nothing.

"Do you think there's been an accident?" said Aggie, at last, as both began to be reassured.

"I think not," replied Lena. "We will tell the folks about it, however, and meanwhile tie it up here."

This they speedily accomplished, and returned home. Both girls had duties in their homes, and one looked for a morning greeting from one very dear to her.

The greeting never came. Hour after hour glided rapidly by; still Lena waited in vain for Job Dean's arrival. It was strange, she thought at first. Then she thought it was provoking, and when the long, weary day was over and he had not come, and the night had drawn around and he still had not come, she did what many girls would have done, wept tears of anger and sorrow.

Next morning a rumor began to run around the village.

Two young men were missing. Job Dean and Joe Bowers had been seen at daybreak, the day before, going out gunning and had not returned. A cold chill passed over Lena's heart as the incident of the boat received a new explanation. They were last seen moving up-stream, away from the village. The boat had floated back upset. Where were they?

"No fear," said her mother, calmly. "They both could swim, and have had to stop somewhere to dry themselves, and then wandered off afterward too far to get back."

But that, thought Lena, was ridiculous. Would Job go so far gunning as not to come back to her?

All that day, all the next, and for many days she refused to be comforted. Of course there was great excitement in the village. The river was examined narrowly, but nothing was found. Exploring parties scoured the woods for many miles round, but nothing came of the search. A mystery had come upon the fate of the two young friends, which no man was able to solve.

Need we tell how, from days to weeks, and weeks to months, Lena alternately hoped against hope, she alone not despairing? Need we tell how years passed on, and the fair girl grew into a silent, sad woman, truly bereaved? She never loved again. She was faithful to her first sweet dream of happiness, and never renewed it. Her lover was gone; where, One alone knew. No new love ever should take the place of that for him, and which she would carry with her to her grave. Offers she had several. Aggie married before a great while; but Lena always said, "I am a widow in heart. Do not mock me in my sorrow." And she was left alone.

* * * * *

One autumn evening, when the sun had gone down with unusual splendor, and the first cool night-winds of the season were whispering around, a woman sat at her window, idly gazing at the fading sunset. She was alone. Not only was she alone at that hour, but she was alone in the world. Lena Rivers had no longer a mother to cheer her, a father to protect her. Both had died a year before, and now she lived upon the competence which they had left her, her only companion a help who had nursed her when she was a child and still loved and tended her with a mother's care.

"Ah," thought the sad watcher, "how many years I have waited! How many years shall I have to wait?"

At that moment a tall person passed by the window, casting a sharp glance at her as he did so. The man was a stranger, and scarcely attracted her attention. Again he passed her, and again looked at her with half-averted eyes. There was no need for alarm. The village was not one where a strange face was looked upon with suspicion. Two lone women there were as safe as in a square of Uncle Sam's boys in blue. The man, however, was not seen again.

The evening sped on, and Jane, the old servant, began the usual preparations for retiring to rest. Lena, with a sigh, laid down her book, saying to herself, "Another day over, another to-morrow at hand."

At this moment a terrific scream rung through the house, and was repeated over and over again. Lena had no fear. There was nothing on earth that could bring terror to her weary spirit. Rushing from the room, she reached the front door, and there found the old servant leaning against the open door, and gazing, with horror-struck eyes, into the outside moonlight.

"Oh, Miss Lena! Merciful heaven! the ghost, the ghost!" she shrieked.

"Come in and shut the door, instantly," said Lena, sternly, taking the frightened woman firmly by the arm. With a shuddering cry the woman complied. "Come into my room and tell me what you mean," added Lena, leading her back to the parlor. "Now," said she, placing the woman in a chair, "now explain yourself."

"Miss Lena, as sure as there's a God in heaven, just now I saw a ghost."

"Absurd!" replied Lena, with a smile of mingled amusement and anger. "You must have lost your senses."

"No, no; it stood close by the front door, and when I screamed out, it glided away behind the trees."

"Foolish creature. You saw some one, I don't doubt. Was it a man or a woman?"

"A man. A tall, gaunt man's ghost."

"How did you know it was a ghost?" asked Lena, with some impatience.

"I hardly dare tell you, miss; but, if you insist on it, I will. Don't scream or faint, my poor darling Miss Lena—it was the ghost of a man who you, long ago—"

"Stop," gasped the other. "Not another word. Do not name him. Forgive me." And she leaned back in her chair with a face like death. "God help me," she faintly whispered to herself. "I am weaker than I thought."

The faithful servant looked on in dismay, and would have caught her in her arms, but Lena waved her back.

"Leave me to myself," she said. "I am better without help." And she covered her face and sat a long while in silence. At last, with a shudder, she rose, so changed that her old attendant scarce knew her. The form, so stately before, was bent and trembling; the face, so calm in its sadness before, was white as marble and cold as ice.

"Jane," she said, hoarsely, "let us go to bed, and before you lie down, pray for him whose name I can not speak, but which is written in every page of my life which I have passed or which I shall have to turn."

And so speaking, declining with a mute gesture all further speech, she slowly passed from the room.

The night went on. The cottage was profoundly silent. The clear moonlight bathed all the landscape, and rested lovingly upon its quaint gables and embowered trellis-work. Presently the door opened, gently and without a sound. A figure, muffled in a dark shawl, softly issued forth, and passing swiftly to where the shadows of the trees darkened the little lawn, paused there. Then a hand, white as snow, lifted the shawl from her head, and she spoke. Her voice broke the stillness as startingly as if a thunder-clap had pealed from the sky, and yet 'twas low and trembling:

"If the grave has given up its dead; if he who was and is my own is here in spirit and in mortal shape, I bid him come to me, in the name of God!"

And as the awful adjuration issued from her trembling lips, a tall form passed into her sight and called her by her name.

She fell upon the earth at his feet. The brave heart had given way, and, as he lifted her and laid her head upon his breast, he thought her dead. But a long, quivering sigh

reassured him, and in a few minutes she opened her eyes and gazed upon him as one waking from a dream.

"Is this life?" she gasped, "or have we met in another world at last?"

They had met at last, and it was life. Such moments are like an eternity crowded into a few heart-leaps. Who can describe them? They come to few; or, if we most of us experience them once in a lifetime, we shudder, and would not willingly recall them.

By degrees, the man and woman, he scarcely less moved at first than she was, became calmer, and questioned each other in eager, broken words. How much for her to ask! How little that he could tell just yet.

"Give me time," he said. "I can not tell you all to-night. I have been a lonely man for all these years, unless the memory of what would freeze your heart with horror be companionship. Perhaps when I have said all there is to say, you will spurn me from your presence as though I were a wretch too vile to look upon."

"Never, never, as I live and breathe in your dear arms. There is nothing, nothing on earth shall part us now," she cried, "if you would have it so," and she hid her face in his bosom.

"Come, then, with me a little distance," he replied, "where we are safer from interruption."

He led her further from the cottage. They seated themselves upon a bank not very distant.

"Can you," said he, "bear to look upon this hand if I tell you that it has been stained with blood?"

She could only whisper, "Go on, I listen."

"Can you welcome me back if I tell you that a great crime drove me hence, the crime of Cain?"

Still she said, "Go on, I listen."

"I can not," he groaned, "without one word of comfort."

She laid her hand softly upon his. He told her all. As the dreadful story went on, her head sunk lower and lower upon her breast, and quick sobs convulsed her frame.

"And now that you know all—what is my fate, Lena?"

She lifted her face to his, while the tears streamed from her eyes.

"And have you not suffered too?" she sobbed. "Have you not atoned already by exile, by danger, by remorse? Ah, dear Job, I have suffered too. Could you not trust me earlier?"

For a long time they sat there, too happy for words, save now and then a murmur of interchanging endearments. And when at length they rose, and he, straining her to his heart once more, let her depart, they had resolved that in some distant place, away in the land of hardy settlers and simple pioneers, the lives so long sundered should be united, to part no more upon this earth.

In a week the cottage was empty. Lena told no one but her old servant why. She had long been solitary, and few inquiries were made as to the cause of her departure. When the two women reached a border settlement, a tall man joined them — Jane's ghost! A quiet marriage followed, and the memory of the long sorrow and agony that had rested upon the trapper and his Lena was swallowed up in their mutual joy.

THE END.

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